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JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN IN 1894

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

BY

J. L. GARVIN

VOLUME THREE

1895 - 1900

EMPIRE AND WORLD POLICY

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CHAPTER XLVIII

AN EMPIRE AND A MAN: THE BEGINNINGS

(1895)

A GREAT Government: Its Formation and Working—England Loves One Coalition—The Triumvirate: Chamberlain, Salisbury and Balfour —The Colonial Secretary Takes Over—A Transformed Department —The "Master" and the Human Touch—"Neglected Estates" and Their Development—Imperial Unity and Social Progress—"When All Men Speak Well"—The Lull Before the Storm.

I

THE powerful regime formed by Lord Salisbury in the torrid summer of 1895 marked an epoch in the proper sense. Supported by massive majorities after two General Elections, it was to outlast Queen Victoria's reign and hold office for the longest period since Lord Liverpool. Soon Chamberlain, not the Prime Minister, was recognised everywhere as the dynamic man of the new Imperialist era.

At the outset neither of the parties at home guessed the far-stretching significance of what had happened at the polls. Liberalism, undone since Gladstone's exit by the confusion of its programme and the antipathies of its leaders, was fated for years to ravages of dissension. As little might the Unionist administration tell its own fortunes. Its destiny, like that of our subject, would contrast rudely with first anticipations of an equable though capable future. With accentuated competition in armaments afloat and ashore, as well as in commerce and territorial aims, the age of *Weltpolitik* was about to begin its magnetic and seismic disturbances.

Through the stresses and storms of this era, through its achievements and inspirations, through its pageantries and its

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dreams, the Unionist regime endured for over a decennium. England does not love coalitions? Not when they seem more hasty than sincere or more scandalous than useful. But what alternative does England love? Not the recurrent excesses and weaknesses of party-rule. Nor any Government without some impress of national character and strength added to other claims. The truth is that Britain abhors the abuses both of coalitions and of single parties. There are times when she gives more continuous support to strong combinations of statesmen formerly opposed than she ever extends to any other mode of government.

II

How the Unionists came suddenly into office, and then into complete power has been shown at the close of the last volume. There the account of the creation and character of the new Government was deferred. Here a fuller view is vital to the rest of these pages. Lord Salisbury received the Queen's Commission at Hatfield on Sunday, June 23.[1] Not hesitating a moment, he formed in less than forty-eight hours his joint administration.

Chamberlain's experiences were now more agreeable than they had been with Gladstone in 1880 and 1886. His record of this Cabinet-making is a good document.

On Monday morning, June 24, the Duke and his Liberal-Unionist colleague in the Commons exchanged views at Devonshire House. Then at noon the four men on whom most depended met at Lord Salisbury's house in Arlington Street. The other three were Arthur Balfour, heir to the Conservative succession; the Duke, still a Whig by nature as by heredity; and Chamberlain, leader of democratic Imperialism. Immediately after this meeting his memorandum was written rapidly in a firm minute hand, and shows that he might have been Chancellor of the Exchequer had he pleased:[2]

June 24.—"LORD SALISBURY said he had been invited to form a Government. The first question was would we join him.

"DUKE: It followed from recent speeches that we were willing to do so, but he would like to be assured that we could agree as to policy.

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. pp. 522 *seq.*

[2] Chamberlain's abbreviations have been filled out where desirable.

"LORD S.: No difficulty would arise about that, as general lines had been already stated in our speeches and particularly in mine [Chamberlain's], and though details were necessarily left open there was no difference as to principles. The Church would be as in past times an open question. Four Cabinet offices might fall to the Liberal Unionists—Arthur Balfour would, of course, be First Lord—as to the rest we might choose what we liked. . . .

"DUKE did not wish for Foreign Office.

* * * * *

"LORD S. asked what my wishes were.

"J. C.: I had desired to take the Colonies, but if it were thought that under present circumstances I could be more useful at the War Office, I would take that.[1]

"LORD S. asked if I would take the Home Office.

"J. C.: I said I had never thought of it and did not think I should like it.

"BALFOUR: He hoped I understood that the whole field was open to me. If I preferred the Chancellorship of the Exchequer there was no reason why I should not have it.

"J. C.: I said I had told Goschen I should not put forward my claims for that office, and again said I should prefer the Colonies—in the hope of furthering closer union between them and the United Kingdom.

"LORD S.: Perhaps we would give a decided answer to-morrow.

"We then asked about our friends. . . . Lord Salisbury will not kiss hands to-day, and the final decision is postponed till to-morrow."

The positions of the four principals were settled. The Duke of Devonshire, declining the Foreign Office, became President of the Council with titular responsibility for the Education department, and likewise presided over the Committee of Defence in its first inchoate shape. Lord Salisbury once more took the Foreign Secretaryship as well as the Premiership, a dualism always disadvantageous to one office or both. No appointment could give more general pleasure than that of Arthur Balfour to be First Lord and leader of the House of Commons. And Chamberlain became Secretary of State for the Colonies.

[1] Many good thinkers held War Office reform to be the most urgent of administrative tasks, and thought Chamberlain, as the nation's pre-eminent man of business, best fitted to undertake it.

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Salisbury's passing thought of him as Home Secretary seems to-day diverting.

Next morning, affairs were concluded. A difficulty arose on one point, and had consequences in the long run. Goschen unexpectedly preferred the Admiralty to the Treasury. Sir Michael Hicks Beach became Chancellor of the Exchequer—a high-minded man, more brusque than civil towards persons and ideas he disliked, opposing a certain hard irascibility to expensive enthusiasms or unorthodox economics of any kind.

Two other Liberal Unionists were invited to enter a Cabinet numbering nineteen members. Lord Lansdowne, who became Secretary for War, had been Governor-General of Canada and Viceroy of India. More than any of them he looked *grand seigneur*, full of finesse and prudence. Another figure had hoped to the last for the highest legal preferment in recognition of his celebrated sacrifice when parting from Gladstone on Home Rule. The pattern of an ideal British Cabinet long cherished in the mind of Sir Henry James displayed the Duke of Devonshire as Prime Minister and himself as Lord Chancellor. Instead, alas, his Conservative senior, Lord Halsbury, a great lawyer, far more robust in physique and destined to become almost a centenarian, returned redoubtably to the Woolsack, on which his short, square figure had solidly dangled through two former administrations. Sir Henry James, though included in the Cabinet, was not consoled by the Duchy of Lancaster and a peerage. This was but one example of the tragedies and ironies incident to all Cabinet-making.

The Colonial Secretary refrained from any hint in favour of his son. His content was perfect and "the family in wild excitement" when Lord Salisbury of his own initiative included Austen Chamberlain in the administration as Civil Lord of the Admiralty. Jesse Collings and Powell Williams received positions. The high-Tory fronde complained bitterly that deserving Conservatives were sent empty away while Liberal Unionists, and especially "the Birmingham gang", seized loaves and fishes with both hands. The natural feelings of the unfed were sharpened when Chamberlain shrewdly forbade fusion while extolling alliance, and described Conservatives and their allies as "the two wings of the Unionist Party". More buzzing than stinging,

under this administration, were the sedulous animosities of some disappointed men.

III

No modern Government before or since has created on its formation a more reassuring impression of ability and stability together. It commanded confidence and respect at home and abroad.

For the years with which this volume is concerned, the inner life of the Unionist regime was determined by three statesmen. On the one hand Chamberlain, who had usually the power of a co-Premier and on some rare occasions more; on the other hand Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour. Subtle study would be required to analyse personal relations in this triumvirate. There has been nothing similar. Salisbury and Balfour, uncle and nephew, bound to be inmost personal allies within the political alliance, were characters both like and unlike, as distinct from each other in some mental traits as in physical appearance, yet with marked affinities. The Prime Minister's avoidance of much social intercourse was evident, but to a curious eye Balfour's urbane perfection in society often suggested something more aloof than Lord Salisbury's absence. Each had the seclusive spirit, and the elusive art. Both had a depth and a finesse of reservation unknown to Chamberlain. Between them and him there was excellent colleagueship without intimacy of friendship in private life.

Between the Colonial Secretary and the leader of the House of Commons there never was a shadow of personal rivalry. These two had to work side by side, and both were brilliant in contrasting ways. A colleague younger by the calendar Chamberlain liked and admired, though feeling himself the younger in vigour, and knowing himself to be the dominating force both in Parliament and the country. Arthur Balfour was the hinge of the Unionist combination. He largely appreciated the strength of Chamberlain's nature and powers. In his heart of hearts the appreciation was sometimes more qualified than he showed. Yet the political comradeship between the leader of the House and the Colonial Secretary remained for years both tenacious and flexible, and it was a chief factor in the working of the great Government.

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The head of the Cabinet was wise and adroit in matters of personal management. That there was little private intercourse between Hatfield and Highbury could surprise no one. For number and style together Lord Salisbury's letters in his own hand are astonishing. But as little did he allow himself to be seen. Not always was the Foreign Secretary easy to find at the Foreign Office, though meditative and assiduous elsewhere. Few of the rank and file of his party in the House of Commons had ever exchanged a word with him, nor was he better known to the majority of the Peers. Two members of his Cabinet were not always sure that he knew them. Later, when Chamberlain takes a determined line of his own in foreign affairs, we are conscious of an infinite deal of reservation at Hatfield.

Foreign affairs and colonial affairs in this period were more and more intertangled in most parts of the globe. This was an unavoidable difficulty neither created nor aggravated by personal motives. But for the evasive prudence of the one man and the wary audacity of the other the ceaseless contact between two spheres of office, once very separate, might have meant, without much fault on either part, a jarring relationship. Chamberlain kept within shrewd limits. He discarded altogether his old resort, the threat of resignation, and never once made the mistake of underestimating those resources of Hatfield which had been fatal to Randolph Churchill. The Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary were at parity in the Cabinet; outside it Chamberlain became paramount. Both men during the seven years of their unique association were determined to keep this Government together. Chamberlain's letters to Salisbury were forcible. Consummate in pointed dexterity were the Prime Minister's replies. To the credit of our Cabinet tradition, the breach confidently prophesied by so many gossips at the beginning never occurred; nor was a veiled strain felt until towards the middle of that long connection.

IV

Little could Chamberlain anticipate that his choice of office, widely thought at first to be below his claims and capacity, would make him within six months the Minister of the Crown

upon whom the world's eyes were fixed. The adventures he sought were more than doubled by those thrust upon him.

Public opinion had designated him for other places in a Coalition Cabinet. A persistent legend asserts that Chamberlain in his heart aspired to the Treasury and was slighted by a tacit refusal. Some eminent Liberal critics have suggested that "Chamberlain ought to have insisted upon being Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1895"; and that he of all men was poor-spirited in acquiescence. That office, as just shown, was perfectly at his disposal. He did not take it because he did not want it, and never showed better judgment. He was not the man to lay Budgets before a Conservative majority.

For over a decade his ambition to be Colonial Secretary never had swerved. We know how deeply he had taken into his mind Seeley's *Expansion of England* and Dilke's *Greater Britain*.[1] More recently he had assimilated the same author's *Problems of Greater Britain*, a comprehensive survey twenty years after. We have seen that as early as 1884 a South African statesman imagined the Radical leader of that day as an ideal Colonial Secretary.[2] In 1886 Chamberlain opened his wish to Gladstone, whose Delphic remark was "Oh! A Secretary of State". In 1887 one of the first things the Radical Unionist said to his future wife was that though he did not expect ever to hold office again, if the chance came he would like above all the Colonial Office, where he "saw work to be done".[3] Since then his interest in all Imperial questions had ceaselessly increased.

Now at last, despite improbability during the ten years gone by, he had his will and his chance, and was Minister for nearly all the territories, except India, of the British Empire overseas. No statesman entering upon that office had been so well prepared for it.

The Colonial Office had never been regarded as a position of first rank. Until 1854, when young Chamberlain first went to Birmingham, its business had been mixed up in a subordinate manner with the War Office. Then under pressure of the Crimean struggle, the separate department was hurriedly created, but not until under the old system far-reaching mischief had been wrought; and especially amongst the Boers in South

[1] Vol I. of this work, p. 494. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 529-530. [3] Vol. II. p. 338.

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Africa by negrophilist pedants like Lord Glenelg. Little noticed at home by comparison with the Foreign Office and the Treasury and other departments, the Colonial Office inherited and kept a bad name overseas. By turns abused for meddling or neglect, it was derided when not forgotten. In recent years under dutiful Ministers like Lord Knutsford and Lord Ripon, it had become less odious but not much more regarded.

Chamberlain's appointment to this secondary post, as it seemed, instead of to the Treasury, might well be widely regarded in the mother country as rather a come-down.

Perception overseas was keener from the beginning. Canadian newspapers pointed to his personal knowledge of the Dominion and the United States; quoted his famous speech at Toronto on the closer union of the Empire; and recalled his exceptional achievement in every work to which he had put his hand. English journals in South Africa remembered that it was the new Colonial Secretary, inspired by Mackenzie, not by Rhodes —as is still sometimes claimed—who brought about the Warren expedition, and secured once for all the way to the North. Had the "Imperial factor" been indeed eliminated from the internal affairs of South Africa, as Rhodes had then suggested, there would have been no Rhodesia.[1] "It was Mr. Chamberlain to whom this country owes the Warren expedition", wrote the *Cape Argus*.[2] In Australia the *Melbourne Argus* said: "The Colonies, while Mr. Chamberlain is at the Colonial Office, will find their largest schemes met not only with practical help but with keen intellectual sympathy".[3] We shall see how swiftly he made his office in his time second to none in the State, or elsewhere.

V

The new Colonial Secretary was introduced to his Department and took formal charge on Monday, July 1, a few days before he turned fifty-nine and entered upon his sixtieth year. Then the elections took him away. It was the beginning of August before he entered upon office in earnest. Within a few weeks after that, the organism, roused to new life, felt his

[1] See Vol. I. of this work, pp. 488-493, and Basil Williams's *Cecil Rhodes*, pp. 80-81.

[2] June 27, 1895.

[3] June 28, 1895.

quickening influence in every vein. His staff, from top to bottom knew that they had "a Chief" who made his predecessors seem shadows.

One who watched the effect and was delighted with it—the late Lady Lugard, who was then Miss Flora Shaw and principal contributor on colonial questions to *The Times*—gives vivid testimony:

> The change at the Colonial Office was marvellous; it was a total transformation; the sleeping city awakened by a touch. Everyone in the department felt it, and presently everyone in the Colonial Service felt it to the furthest corners and the loneliest outposts of the Queen's Dominions. Before it had been a leisurely and sleepy place—such a thing as a Colonial Minister standing up to a Prime Minister or to a whole Cabinet in the interests of his Department never had been known. One little detail shows the difference. Good Lord Knutsford had been irreverently called by his subordinates "Peter Woggy", but they called this successor "The Master".[1]

Master of business and men he was. Five years before, when his ambition was an idea rather than an expectation, Lady Lugard said on her first meeting with him, "What the Empire wants, above all, is a great Colonial Secretary to pull it together". He answered: "You will have to wait a generation for that". Instead, the opportunity had come to him after all while still in the plenitude of his powers. He found himself charged with supervision or control to a world-wide extent, hard to imagine then, and now—owing to constitutional changes—no longer possible. His survey embraced over 10,000,000 square miles, one-fifth of the globe, and about 50,000,000 of people.

In the eleven self-governing colonies as existing when he took office—the word "Dominion" was then only applied to Canada—the Secretary of State was still pervasive. These free communities in 1895 held about 7,000,000 square miles of territory with a white population of only about 11,000,000. Their Governors-General and Governors corresponded fully with the Minister at home. Under his direct rule and administration were the Crown colonies and dependencies comprising by themselves no less than 3,500,000 square miles. From Gibraltar, Malta and

[1] Conversation with the present biographer.

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Cyprus in the Mediterranean to Ceylon, Singapore and Hong Kong in Asiatic waters—from the West Indies to St. Helena and round the Cape to Mauritius and the Seychelles—and, in the Pacific, from Fiji to far-away Pitcairn, inhabited by the exemplary handful descended from the mutineers of the Bounty—stations and islands were strung through the seas.

If method and dispatch had not been the practice of the Colonial Secretary's whole life he could not have attempted what he now achieved. One of his earliest steps was to enjoin on his department the necessity of better arrangements to deal with the day's work in its day and avoid arrears. The reminiscences of some who worked with him will show presently how he coped with the load of papers brought to his tables and with the succession of red boxes and other boxes following him to the House of Commons, to Prince's Gardens, to Highbury.

One can see him now in the spacious room which he made a centre of world-wide influence. Beside his desk, on the right hand, was the big "globe" showing the round of the Empire and the web of connections with all countries. As he sat, the high windows were to his right, bringing out the trenchant lines of his face and its look of intent alertness—a charged composure that might at any moment become confidential and winning or hard and cutting. Even more characteristic in those days was the cool imperious voice of "the Chief" when he called for a person or gave a concise order. That voice was well-toned but peremptory, like the table-bell that no one delayed to answer when he struck it once.

It would be a radical misjudgment to assume from this that his ways with his department were those of an autocrat and a martinet. Far from it. Though he exacted the best from all his subordinates they knew that he would stand by them through thick and thin; and when they were in private sorrow his sympathy never failed. At other times, "Mr. Chamberlain not infrequently would ask us to dine and go on to a theatre, and nothing could exceed his kindness and hospitality on these occasions".[1] Like all the greatest administrators, he had the

[1] Sir Harry Wilson (his principal Private Secretary, 1895-1897), "Joseph Chamberlain as I Knew Him", in *United Empire*, February 1917. Sir Harry Wilson remained at the Colonial Office until early in 1900, when he went out to Cape Town as Legal Adviser to Lord Milner.

secret of daring delegation, giving a play to his staff that brought out all ideas and abilities. No one consulted his colleagues and his permanent experts more fully and carefully in matters of weight. The statements on which he took important decisions were usually the collective work of the Office minuted and annotated by three or four of his chief advisers, passed and repassed before the initials "J. C." were appended to the conclusive word. When his mind was made up but the permanents still disagreed, he was master of his department, and his will went through.

VI

Next let us see how he got through his day. He was as regular as rapid. A late riser, he usually worked with his own secretaries at Prince's Gardens before arriving at the Colonial Office towards half-past eleven in the morning.

The correspondence on his table was the first affair. When he had dealt with that, he fell upon the bundles of papers, including the answers prepared for parliamentary questions. His spoken comment and his terse minutes penetrated complications and seized essentials. When he came to the end of one batch of papers he would ring his bell, and jest: "The machine is ready to take some more". Whereat a fresh batch appeared. So he worked until lunch-time, when he liked to go to the Athenaeum or the Devonshire at half-past one; but sometimes when Parliament was sitting and he was hard pressed, he stayed in the department. "He very rarely came back to the Office after he had once left it, but frequently worked till late in his private room at Westminster, where I have often been with him till past midnight."[1]

Several persons insist on one word more often used of women than of men. They noted his "tidiness". As Colonial Secretary he was as tidy with his papers as in his handwriting and all his ways. At Highbury, for instance, when guests went away late, he had a little habit of putting back all the chairs in the library exactly where they had been before dinner. With all his ceaseless drive he avoided and detested the appearance of bustle.

[1] Sir Harry Wilson, in article quoted above.

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Needless to say that after his mornings within the walls of the department, he was pursued by his work through all available hours elsewhere. "He could get through an immense amount of work in a short time", says one of his assistants, Lord Monkbretton. Another records: "No one could deal more thoroughly or more expeditiously with the mountains of red boxes that used to come down to his room [in the House of Commons] every afternoon, but at the same time he never lost himself in details. 'They see me sitting on the Terrace with a big cigar,' he said once, 'and they think me lazy, but when I go back to the office I make things hum'."[1] The old relentless diligence was best known to his family. He liked now to dine at home or in the House and to go to the play when an evening allowed, keeping up his good-humour and good talk. Afterwards he often returned to his boxes, papers, notes for Cabinet discussion or for speeches, to his correspondence on general subjects as well as departmental concerns, and worked on until he went to bed about two in the morning and, as a rule, slept soundly.

Not content with changing the spirit of the Colonial Office, he improved its aspect, apparatus and procedure. Vigilant in what made for real efficiency, he contemned the pedantries of routine. Until he came to the chair the Minister in person had to pass most of the correspondence and all the numerous dispatches to Governors. Chamberlain gave directions that minor communications were to be impressed with a stamp on his behalf, and that only dispatches of substantial importance should come to him for his sign manual. Unlike most of his predecessors, he had a lively geographical mind. Hence his abrupt reform of the map-collection. In the very early days of his regime a commercial deputation from Hong Kong was to be to be received. On the morning before its arrival the Secretary of State wished to consult a map of that Colony. It reposed amongst others filling a large case at the end of his room. When extracted it proved to be forty years out of date. He ejected the obsolete contents of the case and ordered the collection to be brought up to date without delay.[2]

[1] Communicated to the present writer by the late Right Hon. J. Parker Smith, who was Chamberlain's Parliamentary Secretary in the latter years of his Colonial administration.

[2] Sir Harry Wilson in article quoted above.

The Department ceased to be the drab place he found.

The office itself stood sadly in need of redecoration. . . . It was dimly lighted by candles in candlesticks of antique design, such as are still to be found in a few barristers' chambers in the Temple or Lincoln's Inn. The furniture and the carpet of the Secretary of State's own room were undeniably shabby and out of repair. On one occasion . . . I happened to go into this room, and found him just risen from the dimly-lit table, where he was at work and peering ruefully through his glasses at his somewhat dreary surroundings. "We must have all this smartened up a bit", he said, with the quizzical expression which all who knew him must remember; and the next thing was a requisition to the Office of Works for new plenishings of every description, together with an installation of electric light throughout the building. The dear, dingy old Colonial Office hardly knew itself under this unwonted transformation. But once they had recovered from their first shock of surprise all the officials hailed these innovations with enthusiasm.[1]

This is symbolical. We may say that in many things concerning the relations of the Colonial Office with the Empire he superseded candles by electric light.

VII

His own human touch in another way counted for more than his improvements in departmental practice. Chamberlain's kindling effect on Imperial sentiment was largely due to his frank reception of visitors from overseas. He welcomed men of mark from the self-governing communities; officers and civilians from the Crown colonies and dependencies; all reasonably accredited persons with ideas to suggest or work to promote. Above all, he was accessible.

Before controversy became too rancorous he was ready to receive reputed journalists of both parties, no less than persons concerned directly with Colonial policy and enterprise. In the mornings these interviews took place mostly at the Colonial Office; afterwards at his private room in the House of Commons. Invariable with him was the habit of facing alternatives of action and reasoning them right out, distinguishing between

[1] Sir Harry Wilson.

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logic and expediency; and he had not a grain of false grandeur. Often he found value in a view put to him and assimilated it; often his criticisms converted his visitor. Though he could not suffer fools or bores gladly, he could suffer them civilly while hoping to elude them another time. If you had anything to say that was new and sensible, he did not care who you were, and seemed to forget who he was. First he listened, in the manner that is perhaps the invaluable part of parliamentary training. There could not be a better listener. When you had done, the expert cross-examiner began.

One of his favourite lieutenants in West African matters, Lord Lugard—then Sir Frederick—in a conversation with the present writer, sketched to the life a typical passage:

> When he screwed his eye-glass you felt as if you were going to be sifted to the marrow. If you were carried away by enthusiasm and betrayed yourself as the talk travelled into seeming or real inconsistence when dealing with a fresh aspect of the same question, as constantly may happen to any mind going round a many-sided subject, he would take you up at once quick as a flash and show how closely he had been following you:
>
> "How does that follow?"
>
> "Then how do you reconcile that with what you said before?"
>
> You were pulled up sharp and had to cast back and either correct yourself or explain better. He brought you to absolute clearness.[1]

In those days, when much of the Empire, now organised, was still in the making, Chamberlain's understanding and zeal, his courage and stimulus to courage, gave twice the heart to men from outposts where settled rule was still to be established or boundaries to draw. They were not always capable of interpreting themselves, but those who were more expressive often said that after an interview with Chamberlain they left him feeling as men did when they came out of Chatham's closet. Far away in the depths they felt that there was an eye upon them; that they had someone behind them; that there was a man at home upon whose metal they could rely. Thinking aloud in his interviews at the Colonial Office, the accessible Minister talked with startling candour. Many visitors, whether from the

[1] Lord Lugard's conversation with the present writer.

self-governing parts of the Empire, or from its exotic though settled possessions, or from its struggles in the wilds, were elated when taken into frank confidence.

What he owed to his subordinates at the Colonial Office was next in value to what the department owed to him after he had begun to raise its rank in the State. We have seen in passing that in order to play his full part in Cabinet affairs, in the House of Commons and the country, while remaining master of essentials in the department, he delegated to a hardy extent as regards the bulk of papers received and dispatched. But for this method, but for the pride it aroused in his staff and their answering efficiency, his ascending success during all the eight years while he remained Colonial Secretary would have been impossible. If no department of State could desire a more inspiring Chief, no Minister met more loyalty and spirit in return.

On the political side his Under-Secretary and right-hand man for a long time was Lord Selborne—so far best known to the country by his attractive though hopeless rebellion against the dismal fate of early translation to the House of Lords. A Liberal Unionist in politics, he took ardent interest in Imperial and Colonial questions; he had married Lord Salisbury's daughter; and this link with Hatfield was sometimes as useful as the collaboration between the Colonial Minister and his first lieutenant was whole-hearted. The permanent Under-Secretary at first was Sir Robert Meade, a man of charm and tact, though more akin to the urbane nonchalance of Granville's days than to the energy of Chamberlain's rule. Meade, not sure at first that he would like the new Head, asked what the civil servants had thought of him at the Board of Trade. "The best Chief I ever had", said Farrer. "That is good enough for me", said Meade. Of other senior permanents each was an expert in some sphere of the department's concerns, while amongst the juniors half a dozen rising talents were encouraged by the animated freedom of this régime and by its new opportunities. Especially was he fortunate in his principal private secretary, Sir Harry Wilson, who volunteered for that post when the change of Government occurred, was accepted at sight, and overflowed with good-humoured ability refreshing to the Minister.

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"There was not a man who worked with him [the Colonial Secretary] in those days who did not feel devotion to him." So said a close witness[1] of the work. The same faithful survivor wrote to Lord Morley when the latter published his well-known *Recollections*:

> All you say of Chamberlain's character I can personally corroborate. But no one who has not served—not with him but under him—can know, as I do, his intense loyalty to his subordinates, his acuteness of perception, his patience, his generosity in recognising services which gave him help.

Another colleague saw the man and the work from a different side, and records: "Under Chamberlain the Colonial Office was a happy Office". A good reason for that was once mentioned by Lord Milner to the present writer: "Chamberlain was the soundest and surest Minister I have met in the course of my own career. He never let you down".

One evening, Stanley, the explorer, coming home late from the House of Commons, exclaimed to his wife: "Well, I could live for Balfour, but I could die for Chamberlain. He says what he means to do—and why—and then he does it".

As he dealt in that manner with the House of Commons he dealt with his department, only better, for the Office delivered him from the acrimony of party. There in his time they were a band of brothers, like Nelson's captains, or as near to it as a civilian staff may come.

VIII

With so much animation in the means, what were the ends? Planning ahead, after all, was the very soul of him. Whether he dealt with a private business or with a city or with a nation or an Empire, Chamberlain had the same kind of aspiration and endeavour. Unlike most British statesmen, he began with some ideas both fundamental and definite.

He hoped that the Unionist Government would be strong at home and abroad. At once he told all his nearer friends—as he said to Lord Salisbury at the outset—that he meant to "do

[1] H. Bertram Cox, sometime Assistant Under-Secretary in the department.

something" for the closer union of the Empire, though far, as yet, from any cut-and-dried plan whether for defence or trade. He aimed at developing largely the resources and commerce of the dependencies by the aid of the British Treasury and of British capital. In his mind Imperial progress and social progress at home should converge towards unified or at least harmonised ideals.

This was no new thing. Up to the time of his taking office we find him reiterating the theme. "It is not enough to occupy certain great spaces of the world's surface unless you can make the best of them—unless you are willing to develop them. We are landlords of a great estate; it is the duty of a landlord to develop his estate." [1] Amidst the July elections in 1895 he struck his note as Colonial Minister. The question of empire, he maintained in effect, could no longer be separated from the question of employment. To sustain the growing masses of the people new markets must be added to old:

> Great Britain, the little centre of a vaster Empire than the world has ever seen, owns great possessions in every part of the globe, and many of these possessions are still almost unexplored, entirely undeveloped. What would a great landlord do in a similar case with a great estate? If he had the money he would expend some of it at any rate in improving the property, in making communications, in making outlets for the products of his land.[2]

He proclaims when in office just what he had expounded before.

Only when the General Election was virtually over at the end of July could he take personal charge in Downing Street. When the new Parliament came to business in mid-August Chamberlain sat significantly on Balfour's right hand. It was soon noticed that his Ministerial manner was deliberately quieter than his tone in Opposition. The Colonial estimates to be discussed were those framed by the late Government. He defined the practical spirit of his own policy.

> I regard many of our Colonies as being in the condition of undeveloped estates, and estates which can never be developed without Imperial assistance. . . . Cases have already come to my knowledge of colonies

[1] Address to the Birmingham Jewellers' Association, March 30, 1895.
[2] Walsall, July 15, 1895.

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which have been British Colonies perhaps for more than a hundred years in which up to the present time British rule has done absolutely nothing. . . . I shall be prepared to consider very carefully myself, and then, if I am satisfied, confidently to submit to the House, any case which may occur in which by the judicious investment of British money those estates which belong to the British Crown may be developed for the benefit of their population and for the benefit of the greater population which is outside.[1]

Next day the Colonial Secretary received a strong deputation on West African railways. In that region historic colonies which we had held for several centuries were still only thin coastal fringes no more than half a mile wide in some places. "Joseph Africanus", as journalism already called him, made this answer:

It is only in such a policy of development that I can see any solution of those great social problems by which we are surrounded. Plenty of employment and a contented people go together. . . . The only dominion which can compare with the British Dominion is the old Empire of the Romans, and it was to the credit of the Romans that wherever they went, even in barbarous countries, they left traces of their passage in admirable public works. I am sorry to say Great Britain has in many cases neglected this duty of a mother country very much to her own injury as well as that of the population under her care. I may submit to you, as I did to the House of Commons, what is in a certain sense a new policy. It is a great policy. It is indeed open to criticism, for you cannot undertake a policy of this kind without a certain amount of risk. But if the people of this country are not willing to invest some of their superfluous wealth in the development of their great estate, then I see no future for these countries, and it would have been better never to have gone there. I shall appeal to the opinion of the country, which is gradually ripening, and I think I shall meet with a satisfactory response (August 23).[2]

These speeches were approved in innumerable leading articles, and platforms echoed. Colonial praises thronged from all parts. At home, Opposition comment for the most part forgot the

[1] House of Commons, August 22, 1895. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. 36, cols. 641, 642.

[2] West African Railways' Deputation to the Colonial Office (*The Times*, August 24, 1895).

old habit of virulence and became considerate, almost appreciative. We must admit that party rage had subsided singularly in autumn 1895, soon to be remembered as the hush before the tempest. At the moment even the usual prophets of woe either were torpid or vaticinated about evils that were not to happen instead of about those that did. That autumn was one of the dullest political seasons remembered since 1874, when Disraeli came in and the air was so still that weathercocks seemed out of fashion. Liberal journalists, habitually hostile, remarked about this time that Chamberlain continued to be the quickening personality in public life, and that his speeches were the only events.

His wife was writing to her parents in America: "Joe is working tremendously. . . . All at the Colonial Office say they never had a Colonial Secretary who worked so hard before. At first he thought he could never keep four secretaries all busy, but now he sees vistas and possibilities opening before him and thinks there will be no difficulty about that."[1] Behind all the details was his ardour for some kind of Imperial Federation. "The difficulties of that", he remarked to the House of Commons, "are in proportion to the number of units to be federated." The six Australian colonies already seemed certain to form another great Dominion before his term of office was over. He hoped that in the next few years South Africa would be united peaceably by economic interest and racial compromise.

IX

By contrast, so early, there was an unpleasing but necessary little war. His competence in dealing with it gave another fillip to his repute.

Chamberlain had been but a few months in office, when he sent an ultimatum to King Prempeh of Kumassi. That potentate had defied the Rosebery Government, persisted in slave-raiding and human sacrifices, harassed trade with the interior, and refused to pay the balances of the old war indemnity imposed when Wolseley made his punitive expedition over twenty years before. Even from Exeter Hall the pleas for this dusky brother

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's letters to her parents in America, August 27, 1895.

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were faint. The Colonial Secretary dealt with them trenchantly in a letter from San Sebastian to Sir Robert Meade:

> The attempt to excite English sympathy for the King of Ashanti is a fraud on the British public. He is a barbarous chief, who has broken the Treaty, permitted human sacrifices, attacked friendly chiefs, obstructed trade, and failed to pay the fine inflicted on him after the war; and the only proof he has ever given of civilisation is to be found in the fact that he has engaged a London solicitor to advocate his interests.[1]

Summoned to accept a British protectorate and receive a British Resident, Prempeh remained obdurate. The date of patience expired. Chamberlain wrote with vigour to Lord Salisbury (November 8): "The War Office has, I believe, prepared its plans, and it is very desirable that everything should be got in readiness at once. I should like to have the matter finished if possible before the meeting of Parliament."

Before the meeting of Parliament "the matter" was finished, as he wished, and by a bloodless expedition. Pushing through the pestiferous forests, the Queen's dark regiments, with a body of picked troops from England, reached Kumassi in three weeks. It was occupied without firing a single shot.[2] The old terror of the Ashanti name was broken. The old ferocious valour became nerveless without leadership. The groves devoted to superstitious slaughter were found full of the remains of human victims sacrificed to the fetish; and the monarch was found drunk. In circumstances like these Imperialism was a mode of progress. Prempeh, taking off his crown, put his head between Governor Maxwell's feet. Ashanti was annexed though not finally tranquillised. While everything else had gone so well, it became the Colonial Secretary's duty to condole with the Royal House on the sad death from fever of Prince Henry of Battenberg, a brave man weary of idleness and constraint, who had determined to join the expedition and was not to be gainsaid. This time the malarial casualties were not taken for granted. They helped to turn the Colonial Secretary's mind to the new science of tropical medicine, with ultimate results that were amongst his best services.

[1] Colonial Secretary to Permanent Under-Secretary, October 10, 1895.
[2] January 17, 1896.

X

On the commercial side a very different stroke was Chamberlain's undivided affair, and stimulated all the Empire. The nation in those days was more disturbed about its economic future than ever before. The long age of easy supremacy was over for always. Real free trade—reciprocal freedom of exchange for exports and imports alike—was by way of being wiped out of the world. Protection abroad became more restrictive and more extensive. Contrary to all the original dogmas of orthodox theory, the principal competitive countries, under tariffs, were making headway on many sides. We were still favoured as regards credit and lending capacity, and by predominant wealth accumulated under former conditions. In maritime and financial services we kept a mighty lead. But as to our exports of manufacture, how long could we depend upon the foreign markets temporarily called neutral? The growth of markets under the flag seemed imperative if the progress of British commerce and employment were to keep pace with the increase of population. Doubts, partly reasoned, mostly instinctive, about the principle and working of "free imports without free trade" were spreading wide. The worst was that protectionist competitors, enjoying privilege in their home markets and equality in ours, were advancing at our expense in the British colonies and dependencies almost as much as in the neutral and other countries. In dismal unison our Consular reports recorded these facts, and repeated that our commercial methods were relatively dull and inelastic.

To this question, where all his experience and aptitude came into use, Chamberlain applied himself with intent study. At the end of November he stirred the Mother Country and the Colonies by the publication of a dispatch, then celebrated and still a model. Addressed to "Governors of Colonies on the Question of Trade with the United Kingdom", this circular [1] ordered thorough investigation and detailed reports under classified headings:

I am impressed with the extreme importance of securing as large a share as possible of the mutual trade of the United Kingdom and the

[1] Downing Street, November 28, 1895.

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> Colonies for British producers and manufacturers, whether located in the Colonies or in the United Kingdom. . . . I wish to investigate thoroughly the extent to which, in each of the Colonies, foreign imports of any kind have displaced, or are displacing, similar British goods, and the causes of such displacement.

The touch of the man of business appeared in the annexes. There was a form of return with instructions for filling up. There was a long, subdivided list of the commodities about which specific information was required. These precautions he took so as to exclude mere generalities from the replies and to ensure that the particulars furnished should be of definite usefulness to intelligent British manufacturers in every branch. When stating how and why in each colony British goods were hard pressed or ousted by foreign goods, the Governors were to deal not only with prices, freight-rates, terms of credit, bounties, subsidies, but also with questions of suitable patterns and packings. What most struck and most pleased all business minds was that he asked for actual specimens, not verbal descriptions, of the successful foreign articles. "In illustration of the reasons for the displacement of British goods of any class, it is important that patterns or specimens of the goods preferred should be sent home, unless the bulk is very great." Here was his grip of reality, just as when he was in trade himself and packeted screws in blue paper to suit the idiosyncrasy of the French market.

He referred further to the reciprocal aspect which would one day become critical. Quickening to the Colonies was his novel solicitude for their interests as well as ours. "I am further desirous of receiving from you a return of any products of the Colony under your government which might advantageously be exported to the United Kingdom or other parts of the British Empire, but do not at present find a sufficient market there, with any information with regard to quality, price or freight which may be useful to British importers."

The inner trend of thought, easily discerned in this dispatch to the Governors, would deepen and strengthen in him and decide his last phase. His imagination was not only concerned with trade. There was something else behind this document. In a manner without precedent it was framed after careful con-

sultation with the High Commissioner for Canada, and with the Agents-General for all the unfederated Colonies. "Here, in fact," wrote one Liberal journal,[1] "appears to be the first step on the Imperial side to bring about that federation which, at the beginning of his career as Colonial Minister, Mr. Chamberlain described as one of those dreams which tend to fulfil themselves."

Already this Colonial Secretary had taken a decided part in encouraging closer intercourse between the mother country and the Empire overseas by improving communications. Aiming at "All-Red" lines of transport and intelligence round the globe, he telegraphed to Ottawa the willingness of the Imperial Government to work with Canada for a fast Atlantic steamship service. Next, he supported signally the projected cable to link Canada and Australasia under the Pacific Ocean, despite the space of nearly 7000 miles to be traversed on the ocean-bed. He invited and secured an inter-Imperial Commission to settle technical and financial methods. Hitherto, and for long, efficient sympathy from the Imperial Government with either undertaking—the fast steamer service across the Atlantic or the Pacific cable—had been looked for in vain.[2] Canada and Australasia alike learned that Chamberlain was the energising British statesman of his age.

XI

When the new Parliament rose in September 1895, after a session lasting for little more than three weeks, he, with most of his family, went to the Pyrenees and Spain. About this holiday and what happened in his absence there will be more to say in connection with South Africa. He did not return until the end of October. Since the General Election he had not appeared at any public gathering. Now he had to keep two important engagements, neither of a partisan kind. After the unusual silence, intense interest awaited his first utterances—outside the House of Commons and Downing Street—in his official capacity as Colonial Secretary. Within one week after his home-coming his accents rang through the country.

[1] The London *Echo* of that time, December 4, 1895.
[2] *The Times*, November 25, 1895.

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The Natal dinner was given to celebrate a considerable event —the completion of the railway from Durban to Johannesburg. There was an eminent company at the Whitehall rooms. Sir Charles Tupper, the High Commissioner for Canada, proposed the toast of the guest of the evening. "There had never been a time when the Colonial Office presented a greater field for brilliant statesmanship . . . the Colonies and the Mother Country would realise the advantage of a strong Minister and a strong Government." Chamberlain's reply more than met expectation. Possibly his speaking never found finer touches. As at Toronto years before, and ever afterwards, nothing was further from his mind than to think that Imperialism and materialism were the same. He declared his conviction that the mother country and the overseas States were entering upon a critical stage in their relations. Perhaps in the next few years, certainly in the next generation, the destiny of the empire would be decided. He dwelt upon the saving paradox of self-government—that as freedom increased attachment strengthened. "As the possibility of separation has become greater the desire for separation has become less." Then he came to an image and an invocation:

> That empire . . . hangs together by a thread so slender that it may well seem that even a breath would sever it. . . . I remember on one occasion having been shown a slender, a frail wire, which a blow might break, and I was told that it was capable of transmitting an electrical energy that would set powerful machinery in motion. May it not be the same in the relation that exists between our Colonies and ourselves? And may not that thread be capable of carrying a force of sentiment and of sympathy that will yet be a potent factor in the history of the world? . . . I am told on every hand that Imperial federation is a vain and empty dream. . . . Dreams of that kind which have so powerful an influence upon the imagination of men, have somehow or other an unaccountable way of being realised in their own time.[1]

No unworthy words nor lacking faith, they were not prophetic in the letter—where human prediction of the political future for ever fails—but they were justified in spirit, twenty years later, just after his eyes were closed.

Next, the Colonial Secretary presided at the Imperial Institute

[1] *The Times*, November 7, 1895.

over a banquet given to a Governor-designate of Western Australia. Despite intermittent pauses the several colonies of a continent wholly under the British flag were moving towards union. He looked forward to it both for its own sake and as another simplification of the whole Imperial problem.

Such a step, as the Federation of Australia, will be the consummation of a great idea . . . local jealousies and petty ambitions will be buried in the foundations of a mighty commonwealth, which is destined, in a time which is perhaps at all events historically visible, to outstrip the waning greatness and the lagging civilisation of the older countries of Europe.

But that he had no real fear for the mother country any more than for her young brood, he showed on the same evening in a second speech, thoroughly typical of the prevailing spirit of the country at the time:

My career as Secretary for the Colonies is yet to be made; but I will say that no one has ever been wafted into office with more favourable gales. It is to me an encouragement and a great delight to find that in the Colonies, and in the Mother Country, there is some confidence, at all events, in my desire to bring them closer together. . . . I believe that the British race is the greatest of governing races that the world has ever seen. . . . We are all prepared to admire the great Englishman of the past . . . but when we come to our own time we doubt, we seem to lose the confidence which I think becomes a great nation such as ours; and yet, if we look even to such comparatively small matters as the expeditions in which Englishmen have recently been engaged, the administrations which Englishmen have recently controlled, I see no reason to doubt that the British spirit still lives. . . . A number of young Englishmen, picked up as it were haphazard from the mass of our population, having beforehand no special claims to our confidence and gratitude, have, nevertheless, controlled great affairs, and, with responsibility placed upon their shoulders, have shown a power, a courage, a resolution, and an intelligence which have carried them through extraordinary difficulties. I say that he, indeed, is a craven and poor-spirited creature who despairs of the future of the British race.[1]

[1] *The Times*, November 12, 1895.—Amusement was caused on this same occasion by Chamberlain's remarks upon his new opportunities of patronage and the applications for favours. "I have come to the conclusion that

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In a few months he had made himself recognised overseas, no less than at home, as the purposeful leader of "the dream"—an empire better organised by degrees, both for trade and defence; moving in its own way not at all towards rigid centralisation of any sort, but towards some elastic kind of *Zollverein* and *Kriegsverein*. For many minds in those days that cause had all the force of fresh imagination and the colours of the morning. Liberals were not yet alarmed. The impossibility of a British tariff being assumed—and Chamberlain as yet was far from seeing his way to it—all efforts for the development of Imperial sentiment and resources seemed either harmless or commendable. The parable of the "slender wire" and its electric energies went home. General opinion called Chamberlain the right man in the right place—the strong man in a strong Government. *The Times*, typical of the Unionist press, said: "Mr. Chamberlain has never appeared to greater advantage or dealt with great Imperial interests in a more admirable manner".[1] Liberal journals softened the old animosity. In the *Daily Chronicle* Massingham wrote, after a talk at the Colonial Office: "Perhaps the most interesting experiment in administration which has ever been tried in this country will be Mr. Chamberlain's management of our Colonial Empire".[2] The *Daily News* had an occasional good word for him. The Bechuana Chiefs, who were then visiting Britain and negotiating with Downing Street, as we shall see, called him "Moatlhodi"—the man who puts things right.

Just at this phase his wife gives a glimpse of him in her letters to America. "The newspapers far and wide, and on all sides, are ringing with praise of the new life infused into colonial affairs by the policy of the Secretary of State, and it is a great encouragement after the years of abuse lavished on his devoted head. He feels the encouragement, and it helps his interest and energy. He says a 'smash' must come—they cannot go on in this way, for friend and foe have been at one, and some day some-

a large portion of my time will, in future, be devoted to explaining to a number of estimable gentlemen why it is absolutely impossible for me to appoint nine-tenths of them to positions in the Colonies, while another large portion will be devoted to explaining to the one-tenth who are successful, why I cannot immediately remove them to more favourable situations and healthier climates."

[1] November 7, 1895.

[2] November 27, 1895.

thing will have to be done which will bring a howl instead. Meanwhile, it is pleasant while it lasts. . . . It is quite a new sensation for him. He is very well, busy as the day is long, and in excellent spirits—many fewer headaches. He sleeps like a child and finds getting up in the morning an awful struggle." [1]

Lord Salisbury was brooding on the Near Eastern question, but nothing could bring the Concert of Europe into effective unison against Turkish misgovernment. The woes of Armenia would soon cease to be the centre of attention. Great mischiefs were brewing elsewhere. The uncommon repose of the Unionist Government and the country was disturbed, not by the clouds over Mount Ararat, but by thunderclaps from what seemed as yet to be the quiet quarters of the sky.

For the same reason, the halcyon days of Chamberlain's opening period as Colonial Secretary were nearly over. The real future would little resemble his contemplations at the point we have reached just before the reverberating exit of 1895. As a social reformer he looked to carrying, before the end of this new Parliament, Old Age Pensions in some form, as well as Workmen's Compensation for accidents. As an Imperialist he expected that Australia and South Africa would follow the example of federated Canada, and that it might well be for him to superimpose on these pillars the architrave at least of a crowning unity, perhaps the full entablature. For some months he had been engaged in South African transactions which so far seemed to encourage his highest hopes. He could not tell what a few weeks would bring forth to imperil his political life and to change, not indeed his spirit or purposes, but all the course of his action and the manner of his destiny up to the end.

[1] November 15, 1895.

CHAPTER XLIX

CHAMBERLAIN AND RHODES—AN EXPECTED REVOLUTION

(1895)

Two Empire Makers—Association and Antipathy—Rhodes Presses for the Bechuanaland Protectorate—His Envoys at the Colonial Office—Chamberlain's Objections and Delays—Khama and Native Interests—Kruger Closes the Drifts—Chamberlain's First Ultimatum to Pretoria—The Transvaal, Delagoa Bay and Germany—The Drifts Re-opened—Settlement with Rhodes—Railway-belt and Police on the Transvaal Border—Conspiracy and Cablegrams—Jameson as the Man of Destiny—What Chamberlain did not Know—Prepared for a Revolution not for a Raid.

I

BOOK XI. 1895.

VERY ordinary seemed the beginnings of events which astounded mankind. Antecedent circumstances under the recent Liberal Government; intricate negotiations with the Colonial Office since then; motives and manoeuvres partly avowed and partly concealed on the side of Rhodes and his agents; words and purposes mutually misunderstood; ambiguous cablegrams—all these make a skein of complications not hitherto quite unravelled.

How best to set about making a plain tale of this seemingly inextricable plot? Shall we begin in what might be called the more dramatic manner by describing the outbreak of a crisis and then examine its origins in the light thrown by Chamberlain's papers? Or shall we take matters in their order so that in the end the sequel which startled the world shall almost cease to surprise? On the whole, the simplest way is to record the sequence of things as they occurred in connection with the proper business of the Colonial Office. The hidden part will then spring to view for us as it did for Chamberlain.

What was the situation existing in South Africa when the General Election of July 1895 was over and the Colonial Minister, some weeks after his appointment, was able to take effective control of his department and consider matters requiring immediate attention? Just for the moment Johannesburg did not seem to be one of them. The "permanents" in the Colonial Office anticipated an upheaval some day, but as yet did not expect it in the near future.

The first question for Chamberlain was not his attitude towards Kruger, but his relations with another personage. One whose financial and personal ascendancy in his sphere, whose power over diamonds and gold, whose prestige with British and Dutch alike, whose grandiose imaginations and pervading influences, whose vast territorial sway, caused him to be regarded by many as the "uncrowned emperor" of South Africa.

Cecil Rhodes, aged about forty-two, much younger than the Colonial Secretary, was at the height of his fortunes. As head of the Chartered Company he had created an empire within an empire. North of the Transvaal a region larger than France and Germany put together had received his name. Southward he was Prime Minister at the Cape, supported by the Dutch and overshadowing a High Commissioner regarded as his own nominee. The idea of a British railway through the length of Africa from Table Bay to the Mediterranean he did not originate; nor the lucky phrase "Cape to Cairo".[1] But he it was who popularised the name and struck the world's imagination by the vision. To foreign eyes he seemed a Monte Cristo of colonial politics, using parties, the press, society and the stock exchange to make himself in the scramble for Africa a conquistador only rivalled by King Leopold.

To most British eyes he was a "colossus", as the word ran. In London his social vogue exceeded all that had been told of the nabobs or of George Hudson before the "railway-king's"

[1] Sir Harry Johnstone, *The Nile Quest*, p. 275: "From the Cape to Cairo was a watchword that, as an idea, first emanated from the pen of Sir Edwin Arnold in 1876, and, as a phrase, took shape in writings by the author of this book in 1888 and 1890". See also A. R. Colquhoun, *Down to Beersheba*, p. 259: "It was however in its original form an engineering conception, and the name 'Cape to Cairo' occurs in an article written by Metcalfe [Sir Charles Metcalfe, the railway expert] and Ricardo Seaver in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1888, before Rhodes had given it serious consideration".

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reign collapsed. On his visits home, Rhodes was courted like a sovereign, and held like levées at the Burlington Hotel.[1]

Though he had nourished influence in each of the three political parties at home, including the Irish party, he had worked especially well with the Imperialist part of the late Liberal Government. Lord Rosebery "both liked and admired Cecil Rhodes, who was often his guest";[2] and had caused him to be gazetted a Privy Councillor not long before the Unionists came into office. Above all, the late Ministry had made him promises of large territorial increase by the transfer to the Chartered Company of the Bechuana regions stretching between Cape Colony and Rhodesia. For fulfilment of those promises he began to press hard after the change of Government.

II

It is said that Rhodes regarded "with horror" Chamberlain's accession to the Colonial Office. It was the last appointment he desired. Much would he have preferred a weaker personage. He would find a man of another metal than he had yet met —another man of large Imperial ideas, acutely expert in public business, fully as masterful in nature, and indispensable to a Government with a solid Cabinet and an impregnable majority. Fears were openly expressed that these two personalities would clash. Sober journals advised Chamberlain to work with Rhodes. The pro-Rhodes press, both at home and in South Africa, rather hinted that the Colonial Secretary must comply or fail. Chamberlain had every desire for good practical relations, but there were some difficulties of feeling to get over. The two men did not care for each other.

They had met for the first time at a dinner at Lord Rothschild's about 1889 when the Chartered Company was forming. Blunt colloquy followed when the ladies left the table.[3]

RHODES: I am told that you do not like me?

CHAMBERLAIN: I am not aware that I have given anyone the right to

[1] Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 233 and p. 251.

[2] Lord Crewe, *Lord Rosebery*, vol. ii. p. 563.

[3] Recollected by Sir Austen Chamberlain. "This story I heard from my father himself."

tell you that. But if you put it to me, why should I? I only know three things about you. The first is that you are reported to have said that every man has his price. It is not true, and I do not like the man who says it. The second is that you have talked of "eliminating the Imperial factor" in South Africa. The third is that you gave £10,000 to Parnell, and that is not exactly a claim on my gratitude.[1]

In the half-dozen years since then both men and their circumstances had widely changed.

Now, these two dominating persons with no reason to love each other had to come into direct contact—the one as Secretary of State, the other as Prime Minister at the Cape and head of the Chartered Company, with other plans in his head little guessed at Downing Street. If they could be realised they would make him one of the greatest of men. If not? That other question he does not deeply consider. He is in the mood just now to underestimate everyone and everything that might stand in his way.

Rhodes took the initiative by writing to the new Colonial Minister a remarkable letter in his big scrawl; and his congratulations covered large demands. Sure of gaining a large piece of Bechuanaland, he wanted the whole of it.

RHODES TO CHAMBERLAIN

July 9, 1895.—Dear Mr. Chamberlain, I am glad you have taken the Colonial Office because even if you differ with me as to my part of the world, I know full well you will always come to a decision and before your assumption of office the difficulty was to get anything decided whether yes or no.

I am anxious to take over the Bechuanaland Protectorate at once. It will save you £80,000 a year, and if you give it me I promise to build the Railway from Mafeking to Buluwayo in four years and to begin the railway a month after the transfer. You could put in any clauses you liked *qua* natives, and I hope you will also ask me to insert the Customs clause that the "Duty on *British* Goods shall not exceed the present Cape tariff". This clause I daresay you know the late Govern-

[1] About the same time a similar opinion of Rhodes was expressed by Chamberlain to the late Earl Grey, then Albert Grey, when the latter was about to join the Chartered Company's Board. Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 136.

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ment rejected. I should like you to look at the correspondence. If I get it in, it means that when Africa unites, British goods will have an exclusive market, for on equal terms the outside world cannot compete with England, and the present Cape tariff is such as not to foster bastard factories.

I hope to hear on Saturday that I can bring in Bill to annex British Bechuanaland to Cape. You will find if you look at correspondence that Protectorate is promised to Charter, it is merely question when you will hand over.[1]—Yours truly, C. J. RHODES.

The spacious question of Bechuanaland was soon to make world-history and its bearings will appear.

To this assured epistle the Colonial Secretary replied with cool frankness. He does not promise the larger territorial cession and does not mean to make it:

CHAMBERLAIN TO RHODES

July 31.—DEAR MR. RHODES, I am very glad to have your letter of 9 inst., and do not doubt that we shall be able to co-operate cordially for the mutual interests of the Colony and the United Kingdom. As far as I understand your main lines of policy I believe that I am in general agreement with you, and if we ever differ on points of detail I hope that as sensible men of business we shall be able to give and take, and so come to an understanding.

Your letter reached me after my assent to the Bechuanaland annexation[2] had been given in terms which I think you will consider reasonable, and which will not, I think, hamper your operations. I could not now—even if I were disposed—pretend to impose further conditions . . . either as to Customs Duties or to Native Rights.

As regards the latter, I trust that your public announcement of the assurances given by your Government on the question will have the desired effect of creating a moral obligation on your successors, and this is all I want.

As to Customs stipulations, I will only say that I appreciate your intention in making this offer, and if the subject should again crop up

[1] British Bechuanaland was some 50,000 square miles in area. The Bechuanaland Protectorate, which Rhodes also demands in this letter, was estimated to cover 275,000 square miles.

[2] "British Bechuanaland", not the "Protectorate".

in any form, I shall endeavour to come to its consideration with an open mind.

I hope that whenever you think that difficulties may be smoothed away by private correspondence you will write to me freely and you may rely on my meeting you with equal frankness and friendliness.—I am, yours truly, J. CHAMBERLAIN.

This letter from Rhodes meant more than appeared on the surface. It contained the seeds of all that was to happen.

Rhodes already was the mainspring of the Johannesburg conspiracy. For one purpose he wanted Chamberlain to give him two things. First, and easily sanctioned, the annexation to the Cape of British Bechuanaland colony, through which the railway already ran as far as Mafeking. Secondly, control by the Chartered Company of a further region five times as large, the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Through this territory, inhabited by native tribes under their chiefs, must pass any extension of the railway from Mafeking to Rhodesia: and the very first stretch of that northward track would skirt the Transvaal frontier.

The Liberal Government had agreed in principle that in accordance with the original spirit of the Charter the Protectorate must come under Company rule sooner or later. But they had dallied with Rhodes; eluded his rising remonstrances; and had resigned without fixing a date for the great transfer.

III

When the Unionist Government was installed, Rhodes counted upon a speedy satisfaction of his wishes and prepared to move all his levers. Before the end of July his agents and friends in London were well instructed to lay close siege to the Colonial Office. The chief agent—specially despatched from Cape Town and just arrived—was Rhodes's factotum, Dr. Rutherfoord Harris, an obtrusive, brassy person, not without abilities. Partly he describes himself. "I had been, I think, probably something about eight or nine years with Mr. Rhodes. I do not think anybody was more intimately associated with all Mr. Rhodes's affairs, private, political and public, than I was. I

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did everything for him." [1] The factotum was no slave to scrupulosity. His methods in the present connection and later were to work far-reaching mischief.

Familiar was the Chartered Company's general claim. Part of it, the project of building a railway northward through Bechuanaland to Rhodesia, was in the very spirit of Chamberlain's constructive policy, and made the strongest appeal to his sympathy and support. As he put it, for the British dominions overseas, especially in Africa, railways must be what roads were to the Roman Empire. Canada had shown the example by her trans-continental line linking two oceans. Here at once was offered another long stride in the proposal to start forthwith on laying some 500 miles of metals from Mafeking to Buluwayo. This part of the idea the Secretary of State was certain to receive not only with pleasure, but with enthusiasm.

Yet the removal of direct Imperial authority and benevolence from the native tribes of the Protectorate—that was another thing. Was it necessary; or desirable? Ought not the Company to be content with a right of way for railway purposes? Rhodes, with his secret motive concerning the Transvaal, was eager to hurry. Not rightly knowing that motive, Chamberlain declined to hurry. Bound to consider Native protests against a sweeping transfer, he was unable to see that a delay of two or three months could prejudice a railway plan that it would take four years to execute.

The suspicion spread for many years since then is that Chamberlain, in close collusion with Rhodes's agent, made over a railway-zone along the Transvaal frontier in order that it might serve as a "jumping-off ground" for the Jameson Raid. There never was a charge of its kind more iniquitously false.

Those interviews with the Colonial Secretary in which Harris participated during the late summer and autumn were four in number. Four only, though many persons have assumed that the Queen's Minister and Rhodes's factotum were closeted together on many occasions for nefarious purposes. The conversations took place on August 1, August 20, September 5 and

[1] Report of the Select Committee on British South Africa (Raid Inquiry), H.C. 311, 1897, evidence of "Mr. Harris, L.R.C.P. Edin.", p. 343.

November 6. It is certain that Chamberlain never saw Harris alone. To note that fact and these dates is essential.

The first interview was held at the Colonial Office in the afternoon of August 1.[1] The principal person to be received was Chamberlain's personal friend—though a devoted adherent of Rhodes—that delightful and chivalrous man, Earl Grey, who called to introduce Dr. Rutherfoord Harris. Him the Colonial Secretary distrusted from the first.[2] Lord Selborne was present, with the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Meade, and Mr. Fairfield, one of the Assistant Under-Secretaries and especially charged with South African business.

Fully instructed at Cape Town before sailing, Dr. Harris urged immediate handing-over of the Protectorate. "I entered", as he said afterwards, "necessarily at great length and in minute detail, into all the questions of the late Government's promise, of Khama's opposition, the necessity for the railway . . . and other matters pertinent to the transfer."[3] He was unable to make the desired impression. After listening keenly, the Colonial Secretary at once expressed his warm interest in the policy of carrying the railway to Rhodesia. "I told Dr. Harris that it was almost the chief item in the programme which I proposed for myself." That programme, as we know, looked first to the improvement of communications. As part of it he recognised the signal importance of the Chartered Company's enterprise. So far Rhodes and his friends might rely "upon getting from me any assistance that it was in my power to render". But he would not make over the whole of Bechuanaland; and even with regard to the railway-strip he refused to be rushed.[4]

IV

Then Dr. Harris played another card, still acting on instructions which had evidently reckoned with the chance of just such a rub. "Mr. Rhodes left it to my discretion to add, if I thought fit, that in view of the grave situation at Johannesburg,

[1] Chamberlain's evidence before the Select Committee, H.C. 311, 1897, pp. 337-338.

[2] Chamberlain to Fairfield, August 25, 1896: "I do not think I ever saw Harris alone. I distrusted him from the first."

[3] Evidence of Dr. Harris, H.C. 311 of 1897, p. 336.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 338. Chamberlain's evidence; and Colonial Office records amongst the Chamberlain Papers.

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an immediate transfer would facilitate the placing of a colonial police force in a position to act should circumstances require it." [1] To this contingency the emissary from Cape Town now made what was afterwards known as "a guarded allusion".[2]

So far there is nothing strange. The contingency of serious trouble at Johannesburg and of British intervention had been a familiar topic at the Colonial Office under the Liberal Government. Lord Ripon, as we shall see, had discussed it earnestly just a few months earlier with Sir Hercules Robinson before the latter went out as High Commissioner. It is as impossible here to discuss all the supposed sayings of Dr. Harris as to enquire into those of the mythical Mrs. Harris. But one passage is corroborated. The factotum said "I could tell you something in confidence" or "I could give you some confidential information", or words to that effect. Then as he afterwards admitted the Minister stopped him at once.[3] Chamberlain said, "I am here in an official capacity. I can only hear information of which I can make official use. . . . I have Sir Hercules Robinson in South Africa; I have entire confidence in him, and I am quite convinced that he will keep me informed of everything that I ought to know".[4]

At the enquiry into the origins of the Raid, Lord Selborne fully confirmed the evidence of his Chief. Remember that there were five persons in the room. This is no case of secret confabulation and collusion.

At this awkward hitch, Earl Grey took Harris out of the room, and returning alone,[5] Lord Selborne being still present, resumed the delicate topic, urging that he was ready to give private particulars and wished to give them. Again Chamberlain refused to listen. "I felt that I ought not to accept in confidence information which I should be obliged to use officially even if it were to the injury of those who tendered it. At the time I assumed that this information was connected with the insurrec-

[1] Select Committee Report, H.C. 311, 1897. Evidence of Dr. Harris, p. 344.

[2] *Ibid.*, Chamberlain's statement, pp. 337-339.

[3] *Ibid.*, evidence of Dr. Harris, § 6220. "Mr. Chamberlain at once demurred to the turn the conversation had taken. I never referred to the subject again" (p. 337).

[4] *Ibid.*, Chamberlain's statement, p. 339.

[5] Fairfield's letter to the Secretary of State, "Secret", August 24, 1896; and Chamberlain's "Memorandum" drawn up June 1896.

tion or revolution at Johannesburg, which I learned from other sources was impending; but I had no conception of anything in progress which would have led me to anticipate what actually occurred."[1]

Lord Grey's version is:[2]

> I told you privately that the long expected and inevitable rising of the Uitlanders to secure for themselves the common rights of free men would shortly take place, and that being so it was desirable that an armed force should be stationed on the Transvaal border available for use if required. . . . I most certainly can confirm you when you say that you did not know and could not know of any plan or intention of Mr. Rhodes which could possibly lead to such an invasion of the Transvaal in time of peace as was perpetrated by Dr. Jameson, for I did not know of any such plan or intention myself.

This from one of Rhodes's close associates and best admirers quite disposes of charges afterwards elaborated against Chamberlain and of slanders still whispered.

V

Between Rhodes in Cape Town and his spokesmen in London the cable transmitted the strangest messages it ever conveyed. After visits to the Colonial Office these cryptograms were framed by Harris in concert with the most intimate of Rhodes's other confidants in London. The versions despatched to South Africa were unknown to Chamberlain at the time, or to anyone in the Colonial Office.[3] Highly coloured summaries of his conversation, cabled by Harris, suggest his sympathetic complicity with the inner thoughts of both Rhodes and Jameson.

During six weeks the Chartered Company's representatives failed to advance their business. The Colonial Secretary in fact was more than ever determined not only that he would not transfer the whole Protectorate, but that he would not even

[1] Chamberlain to Earl Grey, October 13, 1896.

[2] Earl Grey to Chamberlain, December 10, 1896.

[3] Select Committee Report, p. 353. Harris Evidence, Questions 6612-6621, especially the following:

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: "Did you ever show the telegrams you were sending to Mr. Rhodes to anybody at the Colonial Office?"

HARRIS: "No . . . never".

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: "Did you ever show them to Mr. Chamberlain?"

HARRIS: "Certainly not; never".

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settle the question of providing a route for the railway until he had opportunity for the fullest consultation with the protesting Chiefs now on their way to London.

Directly and officially Rhodes now urged to Chamberlain that he was ready to begin at once building the railway up to Gaberones, the point—about a hundred miles north of rail-head then at Mafeking—where the route would swerve from the Transvaal border. He asked that for the protection of the work and the workers, seeing the danger of native disorders, he should be allowed to bring the Chartered Company's police from Rhodesia into the zone of construction to supplement the High Commissioner's police. This, he said, would save both time and Imperial money.[1]

Thus again there was an attempt to rush Chamberlain, and again Chamberlain refused to budge, before the arrival of the Bechuana chiefs. He telegraphed the proposal to Sir Hercules Robinson, who objected to Rhodes's proposal as confusing responsibilities.[2]

Clearly, the Colonial Secretary is not an accomplice but an obstacle. On September 5, after six weary weeks of it, Rutherfoord Harris once more saw the Colonial Minister, Lord Selborne being present, but again without result. The emissary who had come to England to bounce Joseph Chamberlain flung off to Scotland, where he stayed shooting for a month.[3]

VI

Rhodes feels every day a goad. So little does Chamberlain understand this that he takes his holiday on the Continent.

But before leaving England he had to receive the three Bechuana chiefs who craved the Queen's protection. Khama, Sebele and Bathoen, arriving in England, soon won the sympathy of the country. The Colonial Secretary came up to London to welcome them at the Colonial Office. Khama as principal spokesman entreated that if the railway must be extended there should be ample native reserves free from the Company's jurisdiction. As they put it later: "We fear the Company

[1] Bechuanaland Blue Book, C.7962, 1896, No. 6. Aug. 21.
[2] *Ibid.* No. 9, Aug. 28.
[3] Select Committee Report, H.C. 311, 1897, p. 351, Harris Evidence.

because we think they will take our land and sell it to others. We fear that they will fill our country with liquor-shops as they have Buluwayo and some parts of Matabeleland and Mashonaland. We see that they are not content . . . and that they want us also."[1] Chamberlain warned Khama and his associates that in any case a strip of land must be given up for the railway, but at the same time he advised the Company to confer with the chiefs during his absence and to make every effort for agreement.

The Colonial Secretary during seven happy weeks in Spain had a better holiday than he was ever again to enjoy. At San Sebastian early in October he was received by the Queen Regent of Spain, and had a very interesting conversation, though there is no room for it in these thronged pages. Letters and boxes pursuing him showed that the South African situation was moving to peril.

President Kruger challenged a grave crisis. At the end of August he issued a proclamation that, as from October 1 the "drifts"—the fords across the Vaal River—would be closed against overseas goods imported through Cape Colony. It was thought at first that Kruger might not fulfil his threat. Punctually he did.

Chamberlain hastened home from Spain to deal with business as critical as he had faced in his life. Returning to the Colonial Office at the beginning of November, he found that the Boer President had created in South Africa a situation involving nothing less than the necessity of an ultimatum to Pretoria at the hazard of war.

What was the inwardness of this crisis? Kruger had striven hard, but in vain so far, for access to the coast and for a seaport of his own. "Independence" was the word graven on his heart. Recently the railway from the Portuguese harbour at Delagoa Bay had been completed to Pretoria. The Boer President was bent on favouring this route and on making himself as "independent" as possible of outlets through British territory. To strengthen this new advantage by every means was his fixed object. He hoped to link up freely with foreign Powers. For this he had sent Dr. Leyds to negotiate a tacit alliance with Berlin,

[1] Bechuanaland Blue Book, C.7962, No. 22, dated September 24.

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although formal treaties with Germany were prevented by the Convention. On January 27, 1895, at the banquet in Pretoria to celebrate the Kaiser's birthday, the President had made a speech of ill-omen:

> . . . I am very pleased to see you Germans here to do honour to your Kaiser. . . . I feel certain when the time comes for the Republic to wear still larger clothes you Germans will have done much to bring it about. It is my wish to continue those peaceful relations, and I wish also, to give Germany all the support a little child can give to a grown-up man. The time is coming for our friendship to be more firmly established than ever.[1]

Only when this speech showed the danger of the future did Rhodes turn to conspiracy. He was lured by his vision of South African union and peace no less than by innate Caesarism. Oom Paul for his part was already placing large orders in Europe for big guns, machine guns, rifles and ammunition, and planning a fort to command Johannesburg—all this at heavy cost, levied on the Uitlanders. They were made "to pay for the razor to cut their own throat".

The Drifts crisis was but another symptom of the same policy. When the Delagoa Bay route was available Kruger began his drastic measures to cripple the established service from the Cape. He laid crushing burthens on traffic from the South. Notably on the fifty miles of line between Johannesburg and the Vaal River the hostile rates were made more prohibitive by systematic obstruction. Then he found himself circumvented.

Traders thwarted his policy by off-loading their goods on the southern bank of the river, and sending them on by a cheap and quick ox-waggon service through the fords and then by road to the Rand. This expedient Kruger had now struck at by fulfilling his August proclamation. On October 1, as we noted in passing, he closed the drifts against all ox-waggons bringing "overseas goods". The Uitlanders thus victimised might be impotent, but indignation against Pretoria was rife among the Dutch in Cape Colony as well as the British. Rhodes was in the strongest position, practical and moral, that he ever occupied.

[1] Appendix to Report of Select Committee on British South Africa, H.C. 311-I, 1897, p. 548; and Pratt's *Leading Points in South African History*, p. 190.

The Cape Government, having protested vainly to Pretoria, appealed to the Imperial Government to uphold the Convention. As early as mid-October, Lord Salisbury caused the Consul-General of the Transvaal to be informed that the British Government, if compelled to take up the case, "would not then desist from their efforts until a satisfactory solution of the matter had been arrived at".[1]

Chamberlain took masterful steps. Pressing for British action, the Rhodes Ministry had not seemed to realise that if "the Imperial factor" intervened, it must be dominant. On the day of his return to London the Colonial Secretary cables at length to the Cape. He transmits to the High Commissioner a stern though courteous message for Pretoria; but stipulates that the Cape must bear part of the expense and guarantee full co-operation.

CHAMBERLAIN TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

November 1, 1895.— . . . You will communicate this message confidentially to your Ministers in writing, pointing out that when once it is sent Her Majesty's Government cannot allow the matter to drop until they have obtained a compliance with their demands, even if it should be necessary to undertake an expedition for that purpose. Her Majesty's Government do not intend that such an expedition should, like most previous Colonial wars, be conducted at the entire cost of this country; and you should explain to your Ministers that you are therefore instructed to require from them a most explicit undertaking in writing that, if it becomes necessary to send an expedition, the Cape Parliament will bear half the gross expense, and that the local Government will furnish a fair contingent of the fighting force, so far as its resources in men may suffice, besides giving the full and free use of its railways and rolling stock for military purposes.

If your Ministers cannot give you such assurances, you will report fully by telegraph and defer action pending further instructions from me; but if you obtain these assurances in writing, explicitly and without qualification, you may send the above message to the Government of the South African Republic.[2]

Here was a statesman who meant what he said, and whose

[1] Correspondence relative to the closing of the Vaal River Drifts, C.8474, 1897, No. 5.

[2] *Ibid.* No. 13.

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clear-headedness matched his determination. Rhodes could not like that tone of authority but accepted the plain terms. The High Commissioner telegraphed to Pretoria Chamberlain's ultimatum couched as ensues:

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PRESIDENT KRUGER

November 3, 1895.—The Law Officers of the Crown, who have examined the question from a purely legal point of view, advise that the recent action of the South African republic is a breach of Article XIII of the London Convention of 1884.[1] Further Her Majesty's Government are advised that the Government of the South African Republic cannot now set itself right by making the prohibition of entrance by the drifts general, so as to include Colonial goods, if and when it re-issues the Proclamation, which Her Majesty's Government are surprised to see that it appears to entertain some intention of doing.[2]

Her Majesty's Government accept the legal advice which they have received; but independently of the Convention rights of the British Empire, they consider that the closing of the drifts, and especially the extension of that measure to Colonial goods, is so unfriendly as to call for the gravest remonstrance, and, while anxious for an amicable settlement, must protest against what they regard as an attempt to force the hand of the Cape Government in Conference by a proceeding almost partaking of the nature of an act of hostility.[3]

Before an answer could be received two Cabinets were held in Downing Street. The Colonial Secretary's resolute policy, already approved by the Prime Minister, was confirmed by their colleagues. After a communication in this sense from Lord Salisbury, the Transvaal Agent in London telegraphed to Pretoria a warning that the British Government were in deadly earnest. Then, as the phrase of the day ran, "Kruger climbed down". The drifts were re-opened at once. It was assumed by Rhodes and most of the British in South Africa, and it was thought probable by Chamberlain himself, that Kruger when firmly summoned would always climb down.

[1] Article XIII. of the Convention of 1884 provided that the Transvaal should not impose on, or against, British goods any duties or prohibitions that were not equally imposed on or against goods imported from other countries.

[2] Kruger over-reaching himself had struck at "Overseas" goods in order that the Orange Free State might continue to enjoy for its produce the use of the drifts.

[3] Vaal River Drifts, C.8474, No. 24, enclosure 3.

But the grim President had given way now for reasons that would not always apply. His armaments were only beginning. German moral sympathy, though thorough enough, could not yet give concrete support. The first effective designs for a new German fleet were stimulated at this very time.[1] However constrained and galled at the moment by Chamberlain's will and power—it was the first direct encounter between these two—Kruger held to his main purpose with immeasurable obstinacy, and bided his time.

VII

Within four months from taking real charge of his department, Chamberlain was thus compelled to give closer attention to the predicament of Johannesburg and the Uitlanders—a case intolerable in theory but perplexing in practice. There was nothing like it in the world. That its gravity might become overbearing in the long run he was well aware, nor could he ignore the opinions of others that disturbances at Johannesburg might occur at any moment. What if there should be soon a genuine popular rising on the part of the subject citizens of the Rand against the armed despotism of the pastoral caste? That ruling minority held an exceptional conviction that self-preservation was Heaven's first law, and firmly believed itself righteous both in possession and repression.

Since the summer of 1894, when the late Liberal Administration held office, the Colonial department had discussed what might have to be done in case of conflict between Uitlanders and Boers. In November 1895 the sparrows on the house-tops seemed to chirp about that impending contingency after Chamberlain's ultimatum and Kruger's "climb-down".

The late Lord Bryce, a Liberal statesman who was in the Transvaal at this very moment, records his experiences:

> People have talked of a conspiracy but never before was there except on the stage so open a conspiracy. . . . The visitor had hardly installed

[1] Hans Hallmann, *Krügerdepesche und Flottenfrage*, p. 30. In mid-October 1895, our ambassador at Berlin, Sir Edward Malet, had represented to Baron von Marschall that the Boers were being encouraged by Germany to take a hostile attitude towards England and that this might lead to serious complications.

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himself in an hotel at Pretoria before people began to tell him that an insurrection was imminent, that arms were being imported, that Maxim guns were hidden. . . . The knowledge that an insurrection was impending was not confined to the Transvaal. All over South Africa one heard the same story; all over South Africa men waited for news from Johannesburg, though few expected the explosion to come so soon. One thing alone was not even guessed at. In November it did not seem to have crossed any one's mind that the British South Africa Company would have any hand in the matter.[1]

What, now, was the Johannesburg problem? That motley Babylon with its mixture of the grandiose and the squalid, with its palatial façades and tin shanties, its international financiers and its professional men, with its crowd of white workers, mainly British, and its cosmopolitan riff-raff, was a city in a state of bondage too anomalous to endure.

Take the case of the Uitlanders as Chamberlain saw it at this time. Already they formed the large majority of the adult population in the Transvaal, outnumbering the Dutch burghers by more than two to one, perhaps nearer three to one. They contributed nineteen-twentieths of the taxation. Their industry was loaded with burthens like the dynamite monopoly. They were liable to capricious exactions and vexations as in the imposition of the differential rates to make them use the Netherlands railway instead of the Cape line. They had no voice in the government of the country; no civic equality for municipal purposes. Decent educational facilities were denied them. Yet over a year before this autumn of 1895 they found themselves liable to be commandeered against the natives and had been summoned to serve or pay. Politically, in a word, they were cattle. Their petitions for the franchise were rejected with contempt. They were told that if they wanted the franchise, they must fight for it.[2] But how? The burghers had the

[1] Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa*, p. 425.

[2] Pratt, *Leading Points in South African History*, p. 194: In August 1895 over 35,000 Uitlanders petitioned for the franchise. Request refused. One member of the Volksraad, Mr. Otto, said: "He did not consider the Johannesburg people who had signed in that wonderful and fat book on the table were law-abiding and he would have none of them. The Raad had frequently heard that if the franchise were not extended there would be trouble. He was tired of these constant threats. He would say, 'Come on and fight! Come on!' "

guns and would have more guns and still more. No industrial population mainly of British stock had known like servitude.

VIII

Other aspects were still worse. The life of the Transvaal could not be separated from the general life of South Africa with its two jarring white races living in presence of the black mass. Everywhere under the British flag outside the Transvaal the Dutch enjoyed full equality. As long as within the Transvaal the British were denied similar equality, they would be regarded as a second-class race throughout South Africa as a whole. Should this disparity persist, the danger of a race war would continue and grow.

Granite was Kruger's character. He looked on modern life through slits. The depth and pathos of his passion for racial independence, his conviction of the righteousness of his cause in the sight of Jehovah, the narrowness of his contempt for the ungodly rabble of the Rand and for the British in particular, the shrewdness of his fears and the ignorance of his courage, especially in its speculations on foreign support—all these made for catastrophe in the long run. His case was that he and his people had a prior right in the South African Republic, that they could only be free by being dominant, that the land was theirs, that they had trekked and fought to possess it, and this to escape an alien rule and alien ways of mind and life. But a sad weakness had crept into this Biblical position. Kruger too now depended on the money of the crowded Philistines exploited for revenue though kept down in politics. He wanted the gold without the diggers. By taking the gold, he forfeited the moral right of the ruling caste to dominate the diggers. Kruger could not have it both ways, as with heroism and dulness he attempted. Much allowance must be made for him, and a rudely-hewn grandeur belongs to his memory, but he was the father of woe.

So little idyllic was the state of the Transvaal before one spasm of madness ruined the British case for the time. Chamberlain explained his own feeling in a memorandum set down months later,[1]

[1] June 1896.

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but never published till now. All the information of the Colonial Office pointed to an eruption at Johannesburg.

CHAMBERLAIN'S "MEMORANDUM": THE TRANSVAAL SITUATION: AUTUMN 1895

The condition of affairs in the Transvaal [in the autumn of 1895] was the subject of constant conversation not only with persons connected with the Chartered Company but also with every visitor from South Africa. . . . It was represented to me and seemed to be certain that the state of things complained of could not permanently exist. . . . With the grievances of the Uitlanders to which this state of things was due—I had very great sympathy. It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, . . . that a revolution which should succeed in remedying such a state of things would both receive and deserve a large measure of sympathy. . . .

The representatives of the Chartered Company who spoke to me on the subject were convinced that, unless the Transvaal Government made some concessions, there would inevitably be a rising in Johannesburg, which they anticipated would be successful; and although I received the most contradictory reports as to the true state of affairs and as to the rumoured preparations of the reformers, there was general concurrence in the information both from private and official sources that matters could not long remain as they were without some serious trouble.

But something the representatives of the Chartered Company had not told him. It was unknown even to his principal official informant in South Africa, the High Commissioner, whom he had assumed to be almost too much in Rhodes's confidence and too amiably subservient. Already, keeping the Queen's representative in the dark, the Premier of Cape Colony and master of the Chartered Company was nourishing and supplying conspiracy in a neighbouring State friendly in law and guarded by treaty. Did not the end justify the means? In glowing colours, Rhodes imagined the formal or virtual federation of South Africa under British influence, if not wholly under the British flag. And he hoped to ensure this by the end of the year, now within a few weeks of its close.

IX

After the first week of November, when the British summons peaceably reopened the drifts, other affairs marched fast. Next came the settlement with the Bechuanaland Chiefs and the decision on facilities for the railway along the Transvaal border.

Baulked by Chamberlain of the control of the whole Protectorate, delayed in obtaining the railway strip, Rhodes had taken able measures of his own.

Ikaning and Montsioa were two chiefs who luckily had not sailed for London. They conceded certain areas, not extensive but excellent for a "jumping-off" ground north of Mafeking.[1] This railway zone, from six to ten miles wide, adjoined the western Transvaal frontier. Rhodes now asked for consequent administrative rights. Chamberlain again referred to Sir Hercules, who this time approved. He had objected to confusion of responsibilities. He consented to the Company's single control. On October 18 the High Commissioner by proclamation placed Ikaning's and Montsioa's territory under Charter rule, and the Company boldly stated that railway construction would start four days afterwards. Chamberlain had sent his sanction from abroad.[2]

The question was not yet fully settled. Fairfield wrote to his superior, who was at Birmingham, a letter afterwards celebrated about the near probability of further unpleasant relations with the Transvaal.

FAIRFIELD TO CHAMBERLAIN

November 4.—DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN, You will see that events are moving rapidly in South Africa. Rhodes, having accepted the responsibilities imposed on him, is naturally very keen to get the Protectorate question settled and has been telegraphing all day to this end. . . . The matter seems in train for settlement. Khama is utterly obdurate as regards the Company, and will grant them nothing whatever; but will (so the missionaries say) grant anything to you in reason. . . . Rhodes wants you then to authorise the Bechuanaland Border police to enlist

[1] Sir Lewis Michell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Cecil J. Rhodes*, vol. ii. pp. 135-136.

[2] *Bechuanaland Blue Book*, C.7962, No. 32.

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with the Company. This they would be delighted to do, as we are strict masters. . . . Rhodes, very naturally, wants to get our people off the scene as this ugly row is pending with the Transvaal. That I think is also our interest. . . . I do not think that there can be any doubt but that the Transvaal will give way on the immediate question of the drifts; but that will not end the political "unrest". They will have in their hands to-night or to-morrow morning a letter from Montagu White, written after Lord Salisbury's message to him, warning them that the British Government is in deadly earnest.[1]

Chamberlain was determined to bring about at once a final settlement between the Bechuana chiefs in London and the Company. A "great indaba", as the phrase went, was held at the Colonial Office on the afternoon of Wednesday, November 6. Chamberlain, taking a blue pencil, marked out on the map ample tribal reserves to be entirely under the Crown; the rest of the Protectorate passing to Chartered administration.[2] Khama and his brethren conferred on the Colonial Secretary the title of "Moatlhodi", the Man who Rights Things.

X

The Company was to gain, altogether, about a hundred thousand square miles of territory, but was to forfeit the £200,000 (£20,000 annually for ten years) promised by the late Liberal Government as a subsidy for the railway. To expedite the settlement of November 6, Rhodes had agreed to this sacrifice. In a fever of haste, he loathed checks and limitations.

Few things in blue books are as diverting as Rhodes's wrathful messages after this transaction:

RHODES AND HARRIS

November 12.—*R. to H.*— . . . It is humiliating to be utterly beaten by these niggers. They think more of one native, at home, than the whole of South Africa. . . .

November 13.—*H. to R.*— . . . Referring to your recent telegram to grant £200,000 and more if necessary to secure date [of complete

[1] Select Committee Report, 311, 1897, p. 449.

[2] Bechuanaland Blue Book, C.7962, No. 35.

Company control in the "jumping-off ground"], of course we might have done better if we had been given time.

November 15.—*R. to H.*— . . . Settlement is a scandal. . . .

November 19.—*H. to R.*—I shall withhold for the present any definite offer of £200,000 and endeavour to drift, and we presume that railway strip and police sufficient for Dr. Jameson plan which you telegraphed was principal object.

November 23.—*R. to H.*—Yes, you can give £200,000, we would sooner not have it as I do not wish English people to think we have made pecuniary bargain which is unfair to them. I never objected to this part of the agreement, but I do object to being beaten by three canting natives especially on score temperance when two of them Sebele Bathoen they are known to be utter drunkards the whole thing makes me ashamed of my own people. . . .[1]

We see that at this late date, little more than six weeks before the Raid, there is neither complicity nor cordiality between the Colonial Secretary and the "Colossus" overseas. Yet in view of coming emergencies at Johannesburg the main thing from Rhodes's standpoint was done. Dr. Jameson's base on the Transvaal frontier was secured. The Chartered Company controlled the police in its other territories, and received, as of course, the same control in its new Bechuana zone. On what argument except specific suspicion of Rhodes, for which there was as yet no ground in Chamberlain's mind, could the railway belt be conceded and the police rights withheld? "It was explained to me that the police were required for the guarding of the railway; that when the telegraph had been made some time previously difficulties had arisen . . . and certainly it never entered into my mind at that time that it could be possible that with a force of that sort any attempt should be made at a hostile invasion of the Transvaal."[2]

Here we must look a little ahead. The camp chosen for the new force now to be organised by Dr. Jameson, appointed Resident Commissioner for the border-belt, was Pitsani Potlugo. This dreary little station on the northward road was nearly 30 miles from Mafeking, but only three miles from the Transvaal. Thither

[1] These telegrams are printed in Select Committee Report, Appendix (1897), H.C. 311–I, pp. 595-596.

[2] Chamberlain's evidence, Select Committee Report, 311, pp. 338-339.

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a body of the Company's troopers were moved down from Buluwayo. From another source Jameson was eager to reinforce himself with seasoned men and mounts. Imperial administration being withdrawn from the railway belt, the Bechuanaland Border Police were to be disbanded. There were only some 200 of them, but they were good stuff. Rhodes pressed that they should be not only permitted but encouraged to re-enlist under the Company. Chamberlain gave the permission, but not the encouragement.

> I am to point out that no promise has been made that the High Commissioner will use his influence to induce the Bechuanaland Border Police to enrol in the Company's service. In such a matter officers and troopers must be left free to exercise their judgment. But they will be told that the force is to be disbanded, and that subject to the observance of existing engagements made with individuals, their relations with the Government will cease. This information will probably influence a large number to accept the Company's offer; and Mr. Chamberlain has little doubt that the Company will obtain as many volunteers as it has occasion for.[1]

Presently, in fact, more than half the little force cheerfully re-engaged with Dr. Jameson, who by various means brought up his strength to about five hundred.

But what was the object on the frontier as understood by the Secretary of State? Officially he had defined it to the High Commissioner. He wrote, and the words are worth marking, that the whole strip "forms a frontier against an independent State and that the Chartered Company now becomes charged with the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of that frontier, and performing all police and other similar duties in connection with it; and that it may claim to be given the means of discharging such duties."[2]

XI

But also Chamberlain was undoubtedly providing, and was bound to provide, for the contingency of a Johannesburg revolution. All information led the Colonial Office to expect a

[1] Colonial Office (through Fairfield) to the British South Africa Company, December 10, 1895.

[2] Bechuanaland Blue Book, C.7962, No. 39. Chamberlain to Sir Hercules Robinson, November 9, 1895.

genuine rising for reform—a democratic movement of the old kind with which Liberals were wont to sympathise.

If that happened the British Government would be compelled to intervene—as the former Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, and the former High Commissioner, Lord Loch, had not doubted; as the present High Commissioner Sir Hercules Robinson did not doubt, though he had been chosen for his moderation by the Liberal Government. The new police on the border would furnish the speediest means of intervention if made necessary by a revolt. Then and only then. Other official measures would follow, and it was time to arrange for them in the way we shall soon learn.

What Chamberlain did not begin to guess were the nature and ramifications of the subterranean methods employed by Rhodes and his associates to promote a conspiracy within the Transvaal; and Jameson's idea of making a blow from without the coup of the plot.

A second thing Chamberlain could as little guess. Before arriving in England to negotiate with the Colonial Office, Harris was instructed to purchase, on a large scale, arms and ammunition for the conspiracy. These supplies ostensibly were for the Chartered Company in Rhodesia.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Your recollection is that when you arrived in England you already knew you were to buy 4000 rifles and three maxims. Any ammunition?

HARRIS: . . . I think 200,000 or 300,000 rounds.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: You went and saw the manufacturers or agents and ordered them?

HARRIS: . . . I gave the orders and saw to the whole thing myself.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: And any arrangement for what you call the diversion of these arms was a secret arrangement made out at the Cape?

HARRIS: Out in the Cape entirely.[1]

The De Beers Company, directed by the Cape Premier, was to smuggle these fighting materials into Johannesburg.

A third thing Chamberlain could not begin to conceive and that was the fantastic state of mind which would soon possess

[1] Select Committee Report, p. 354.

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"Dr. Jim", whom he did not yet regard in the least as a protagonist. But Jameson picturing himself as the real man of emergency, equally intoxicated by former success against savages and by visions of higher fame, would soon be tempted to "make the revolution" if it showed any ignoble signs of failing to make itself.

He went to Johannesburg and induced the reform leaders to put themselves in his power. Kruger had yielded to Chamberlain's ultimatum on the drifts. Amongst the politically-minded Uitlanders a false exaltation prevailed. They dreamed of revolution easy and ideal, bloodless and brilliant. From Cape Town, Jameson arrived at South Africa's "city of the future' on November 17 and left on November 21 or 22.[1]

During these few days—the exact date is uncertain—he asked for and he obtained the undated letter, signed by five of the principal reform leaders, which he might publish for his justification whenever the anticipated emergency occurred. This florid composition contained some words looking to effect upon the primary emotions of the British public. "What we have to consider is what will be the condition of things here in the event of a conflict? Thousands of unarmed men, women and children of our race will be at the mercy of well-armed Boers, while property of enormous value will be in the greatest peril."[2] The signatories and their friends, one and all, maintained afterwards that "the Doctor" was not to appear until he was called in; that the letter was not to be used without their authorisation. Jameson put it in his pocket and was confirmed in his fixed ideas. "Dear Bobby . . . the almost certain date will be December 26."[3] He saw himself riding on the night of Boxing Day as a deliverer and a history-maker towards Johannesburg. A few weeks afterwards the conditional invocation to save women, children and property was dated December 28 by the delectable Dr. Harris—when the reformers were seeking desperately to deter Jameson instead of inviting him and when the letter as used was equivalent to a shameless fake.

[1] Ian Colvin, *Life of Jameson*, vol. ii. pp. 34-38.

[2] "*The Times*" *History of the War in South Africa*, edited by L. S. Amery, vol. i. pp. 163, 164.

[3] Ian Colvin, *Life of Jameson*, vol. ii. p. 35. Jameson to the Hon. Robert White, dated Johannesburg, November 19, 1895.

XII

A fourth thing beyond imagining by the Colonial Minister was the character of the messages passing between Rhodes and his factotum in London. Harris never was admitted to a private talk, and never had one word of confidential intercourse with the Secretary of State. All the telegrams from London to the Cape which have been called compromising by Chamberlain's assailants were sent by Harris after interviews with Fairfield. Add that the summaries were in the obscure cryptograms of a commercial cipher.

November 2, 1895.—*Harris to Rhodes.*—Very confidential. If you cannot carry out the plan of Dr. Jameson have every reason to believe J. Chamberlain intends active policy Imperial with intention to federation British sphere of influence in his way and he will expect you to adopt his views.[1]

Now, at that moment, Chamberlain and the British Government were proceeding on the drifts crisis without the slightest thought of Jameson.

November 4.—*Harris to Rhodes.*—J. Chamberlain he does not return to London until to-morrow. I have spoken open E. Fairfield and I have accepted if Colonial Office (they) will transfer to us balance protectorate with police 7 November we will agree to any liberal native reserves for native chiefs. . . . Regret to inform you that J. Chamberlain he does continue punching Consul General Transvaal with regard to drifts. E. Fairfield is anxious Johannesburg if they take steps in precedence of.

The Secretary of State is still driving his own way. This seems a friendly warning from Fairfield to Rhodes not to get in the way. Another telegram which has remained conjectural but will be explained further on in these pages brought a renowned reply.

November 6.—*Rhodes to Harris.*—As to English flag they must very much misunderstood me at home. I of course would not risk everything as I am doing except for British flag.

What of this? The Colonial Office was still assured, like the

[1] These and the telegrams following here are in "Appendix to the Second Report from the Select Committee on British South Africa", 311–I, pp. 593-595.

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High Commissioner, that a rising at Johannesburg and the necessity for British intervention could not long be postponed. Chamberlain surmised that "a New Republic" swayed by the Rand capitalists might not be an advantage to the Imperial cause in South Africa. Fairfield expressed this feeling to Harris, who gave reassurances confirmed by Rhodes in the telegram above.

The truth concerning us in this biography is both certain and simple. At no point had Chamberlain been moved by Rhodes's ideas. He had insisted on his own. Refusing to transfer the Protectorate as a whole, he had guaranteed the suppliant chiefs against interference by the Company. To promote the railway he conceded the border-strip and police-control with the High Commissioner's emphatic approval. In no way was that part of the policy determined by near possibilities in the Transvaal. But beyond doubt he recognised that the new force to be formed at Pitsani might serve as first aid should intervention by the British Government at Johannesburg become necessary.

The close of one act of this drama is now marked by the exits. Khama, Sebele and Bathoen had been variously fêted. They had visited Birmingham. They had dined with the Colonial Secretary; and accompanied by him they had been received at Windsor Castle by the Queen. Happy in their deliverance and security they left England on November 23, and disappear from these pages. Rhodes's agent had some final arrangements to make. During the four months since his first unpromising encounter with Chamberlain he had obtained the railway belt and ordered the arms and ammunition for the conspiracy. On leaving London he gave a copy of the Company's private code to Miss Flora Shaw of *The Times*, afterwards Lady Lugard—admirable woman, ardent admirer of Rhodes and staunch friend to the Uitlanders. Then, on November 29th, Dr. Rutherfoord Harris sailed for South Africa with Alfred Beit, hoping to arrive just in time to behold nothing less than the downfall of Kruger, the glory of Jameson and the apotheosis of Rhodes.

CHAPTER L

THE EVE OF CALAMITY: WORLD POLITICS AND SOUTH AFRICAN FATE

(1895)

VENEZUELA and Johannesburg—The British Government and the Expected Revolution—Vital Letter from Sir Hercules Robinson—The High Commissioner may go to Pretoria and hold a Transvaal Plebiscite—President Cleveland's Bolt from the Blue—Can the Uitlanders' Rising be Postponed?—Colonial Office Letters—Chamberlain on Immediate Action or Indefinite Postponement—Maguire's Cable to Cape Town—"Instant Flotation"—Christmas at Highbury and at Pitsani—Surprise on Surprise—"The Revolution has Fizzled Out"—Chamberlain learns that a Raid is Possible—His Urgent Warning to Rhodes—Too Late.

I

ASMODEUS opened the roofs of the houses to disclose private life. This chapter must reveal the inward workings of a Government department. Chamberlain's papers show that before he entered the Colonial Office the Rosebery Government was perturbed by the situation of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal. Looking like himself to the contingency of a revolution, though not of a raid, his Liberal predecessors had to consider the pros and cons of intervention.

In the summer of 1894, a year before Chamberlain took office, British Uitlanders were excited by efforts to subject them to military service or war-tax, while the franchise was refused and free speech restricted. To discuss these and other questions, Sir Henry Loch—not yet a peer—visited Pretoria. Upon his arrival the feeling of the British residents broke out. They hailed the High Commissioner, and insulted the President. The

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Union Jack was waved over Kruger's very head. This scene he never forgave.

Loch urged that the Cape garrison should be increased; he referred to rail-head at Mafeking as one convenient base in emergency; and added, "I apprehend it would be impossible for Her Majesty's Government to remain indifferent in the event of a sudden outbreak in Johannesburg, the result of Boer injustice and oppression".[1] The Transvaal representative in London, Montagu White, was privately told by the Colonial Office that if the Uitlanders were driven to an outbreak, we could not look on unmoved.[2] At the same time Loch's resolute feeling alarmed the Liberal Government. His term soon expired and they gladly replaced him by another High Commissioner—one who had held the same office for long years before and was well known to be docile to Rhodes and conciliatory towards the Boers. Aged seventy-one, no longer what he had been, this amiable but tired personage was Sir Hercules Robinson.

He left for South Africa a few weeks before the Liberal Government resigned. Amongst Chamberlain's memoranda there is an illuminating note:

> Sir Hercules Robinson, however, told me that when he was sent out by Lord Ripon the latter said that what he most feared was a rising at Johannesburg. In this case Sir H. Robinson ought to go up and call on both sides to preserve the peace and announce his intention of arbitrating between the parties.
>
> Sir H. Robinson said "that is all very well but I must have a force behind me to support my demands, and 1500 men would be no good".
>
> "Oh no," said Lord Ripon, "but we would give you six times that number."[3]

Chamberlain disapproved an appointment made just before he took office, but wished to make the best of it. A few months later he thought it essential to know the High Commissioner's whole mind. At the beginning of October, while still in Spain, he wrote a private letter to Cape Town, and begged Sir Hercules to be full and frank in reply. When it came the reply from the

[1] Sir Henry Loch to Lord Ripon, July 18, 1894 (Chamberlain Papers).

[2] Chamberlain Papers. Colonial Office Minute in preparation for Raid Enquiry (June 1896).

[3] Note by Chamberlain, January 23, 1896.

most moderate of men was startling. In fullness it was a treatise; in frankness it hardly fell short of Chamberlain's own habit.

Arranged under five heads, it came to this—that the Johannesburg position was untenable and violent outbreak likely; that a New Republic created there seemed more probable than adhesion to the British flag; that in case of revolt the Imperial power must arbitrate by awe or force; that the High Commissioner should go instantly to Pretoria and summon a free Assembly "to be elected by every adult white male in the country"; that on these impartial principles he might hope for the support of the Cape Dutch; and that British influence, so far as it could be exerted without coercion, should favour a decision for self-government within the Empire rather than the alternative of Independence, which would be strongly advocated and might prevail. Sir Hercules said that if his advice were followed "a revolution might take place without the loss of a life and even without firing a shot".

As a view of the South African problem a few weeks before the Jameson Raid this State-paper, from a High Commissioner who was pro-Afrikander, is so remarkable that though long it must be given almost in full:[1]

HIGH COMMISSIONER TO COLONIAL SECRETARY

Government House, Cape Town, November 4, 1895.—DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN, I will now reply as far as I can to the questions you put to me in your confidential letter of the 2nd of October as to the state of affairs in the Transvaal between the Uitlanders and the Government.

I. Is a change likely to come soon?

The one point which seems clear to me is that the present position there cannot last. The male adult burghers are now below 15,000, and this number is steadily diminishing as the old Boer landowners sell their farms and trek away to the north and west. On the other hand, the Uitlanders are now estimated at 60,000 adult males, and they are being reinforced at the rate of 250 a day—being at the rate of 75,000 a year. These people contribute nineteen shillings out of every pound of revenue

[1] Those familiar with the history of some official documents cannot help wondering whether this letter in the High Commissioner's name was not drafted by his able Secretary, Sir Graham Bower, who was in closer communication with Rhodes than Sir Hercules Robinson knew.

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raised in the country. But notwithstanding the large and undue share which they bear of the public burthens, they are not allowed any voice in the appropriation of the revenue, and no consideration whatever is shown to their reasonable wishes and requirements. The Government is run almost exclusively in the interests of the Dutch farmers and of the Hollander officials and adventurers. The taxation of the mining industry, which has rescued the country from bankruptcy, has now been carried almost to the verge of plunder, and it is clear that such a situation cannot be indefinitely prolonged. . . .

I am told the capitalists have now abandoned all hope of a peaceful settlement of their grievances and contemplate taking the law into their own hands. They see that the Volksraad is composed of Boer members who are for the most part hopelessly incapable of assimilating liberal ideas—that the President is jealous of any encroachment on his power, and sets his face resolutely against all concessions—and that the Hollander officials, who pull the wires, are to a man opposed to change which would involve their expulsion from place and power.

The chances are, therefore, that a change will be brought about by violence. On three occasions during the last six years a rising seemed within measurable distance. No doubt so long as people are making money individually they will endure a great many political wrongs, but a check in this respect, in conjunction with the illiberal and oppressive actions of the Government on all questions in which the Uitlanders are concerned, might precipitate an outbreak. It seems almost certain, therefore, that a revolt will take place sooner or later, and an accident might bring it about any day.

II. What would be the effect of a change?

At the present time nine out of every ten Englishmen in the Transvaal would prefer an Anglicised and liberalised Republic to a British Colony in any shape, whether constitutional or otherwise.

They dislike the native policy of England—they dislike the meddling of the House of Commons and of the philanthropic societies—and they dislike the attempt to force the Indian coolie into a position of political and commercial equality with the whites. They would therefore prefer to remain independent.

The Boer has the same feeling, but intensified by an hereditary sense of having been worried, misjudged and misrepresented.

Neither party would care to accept the rule of any foreign European power, but both would prefer English predominance to that of any other European power.

Of course, looking to the possible federal union of all the communities in South Africa under the British flag, the best thing would be the transformation of the South African Republic into a self-governing British colony; but this, though greatly to be desired, would represent the maximum instead of the minimum of change, and might be more difficult to carry just now than the mere liberalising of the existing constitution.

III. What action should be taken in case of the outbreak of Civil War?

Immediately on news being received of a rising at Johannesburg and the establishment there of a provisional Government—for that, I take it, is the form a revolt would take—the High Commissioner as the representative of the paramount Power in South Africa should issue a Proclamation directing both parties to desist from hostilities and to submit to his arbitration. H.M. Government should notify their intention of supporting this attitude, and it might be announced in the Home press that a large force had been ordered to hold itself in readiness to proceed to South Africa.

The High Commissioner should at once proceed to Pretoria and after hearing the complaints on both sides order the election of a Constituent Assembly—such Assembly to be elected by every adult white male in the country.

It would be all important that the High Commissioner should act instantly on news being received of a disturbance, as the Hollanders would be disposed, if not forestalled, to seek the intervention of Germany. I should be glad to hear if you concur generally in this idea. If followed, it seems to be not impossible that a revolution might take place without the loss of a life and even without firing a shot.

IV. What would be the attitude of the Cape?

The Cape Dutch sympathised with their Transvaal kinsmen in the war of 1881, but the ungrateful and hostile attitude of President Kruger since, and the conciliatory policy of H.M. Government, have greatly changed that feeling.

Nevertheless, if a race war broke out, the ill-deeds of Kruger might

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be forgotten in a burst of national sentiment. On the other hand, if the High Commissioner's intervention were directed to the prevention of race war, he would probably receive the support of both races; and it must be remembered that the material interests of the Cape farmers would be on the side of some closer union with the Transvaal in the matters of customs and railways than can be looked for under the present regime.

V. What would be the composition and result of the deliberation of a Constituent Assembly?

This has to some extent been dealt with under head II. I have indicated the forces likely to be operating, and the rest is a question of men, management and the circumstances of the moment. If the Convention were to represent fairly the wealth, intelligence and various nationalities of the population, a large majority would be English; but if a peaceful and permanent settlement is to be effected the Dutch minority would have at the same time to be adequately represented. Whether such a Convention would decide upon independence, or upon a self-governing British colony, is a matter of conjecture; but so far as the members could be influenced without coercion our weight should be thrown into the scale of the latter as the best course for the Transvaal itself, as well as for South Africa generally.

Believe me, Yours very faithfully, HERCULES ROBINSON.

II

On Chamberlain's mind this letter from his adviser in South Africa threw a flood of light. Just before he received it, other signs suggested imminent crisis in the Transvaal. Lionel Phillips, hitherto supposed to be anything but a firebrand, had made his insurgent speech to the Chamber of Mines. "It is a mistake to imagine that this much maligned community, which consists, anyhow, of a majority of men born of free men, will consent indefinitely to remain subordinate to the minority in this country and that they will for ever allow their lives, their property and liberty to be subject to its arbitrary will."[1] There was talk of an Uitlander strike against paying taxes of any kind until grievances were redressed. The High Commis-

[1] November 20, 1895.

sioner supplemented his letter by telegraphing to the Colonial Secretary, "Kruger will have forthwith to decide whether he will yield to reasonable demands for reform or face a revolt" (November 26).

Chamberlain consulted Lord Salisbury and other principal members of the Cabinet. The procedure proposed by Sir Hercules, should the crisis arise, was approved—his instant journey to Pretoria, his enforcement of peace and arbitration, the summoning of a Constituent Assembly. On December 6, Chamberlain telegraphed to Robinson, "Agree generally with your idea in private letter of Nov. 4th. . . . I take for granted that no movement will take place unless success is certain" [words deserving to be marked], "a fiasco would be most disastrous." In further agreement with the High Commissioner he expressed his hope that one result of the revolution would be the acceptance of the British flag.

The Colonial Secretary and his colleagues could not doubt that a timely thing had been done in authorising the Chartered Company to constitute a police in the railway belt along the Transvaal border. Pending military reinforcements at need from home or from India, it would be the quickest means of supporting the High Commissioner's action in emergency. There seemed nothing strange or hazardous about the camp at Pitsani. When contemplating the same emergency had not the former High Commissioner, Lord Loch, remarked that "the extension of the railway to Mafeking in British Bechuanaland renders the approach to Johannesburg easy of accomplishment".[1]

Early in December 1895 the transfer of the border police to the Company was practically completed with the sanction of Sir Hercules. Assumed at home to be the safest of men in the sense of being least Imperialist by temperament, the good old gentleman fondly supposed himself to be as formerly in Rhodes's fullest confidence. Equally was it taken for granted that the Cape Premier would do nothing willingly to ruin his long alliance with the Dutch.

[1] Lord Loch to Lord Ripon, July 18, 1894. It must be noted that the Colonial Office under Liberal administration was more alarmed than convinced by Lord Loch.

III

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So matters stood when a succession of perils in foreign policy burst amongst these calculations like shells crashing into a sleeping city. The comparison is not too strong. Much as we have learned about Chamberlain in the present work, these trials will bring a fresh revelation of his pith and resourcefulness in danger.

Nothing could be more erroneous than the common notion that friction between Britain and Germany was not serious before the Jameson Raid.

Between these two Powers the old tradition of grumbling kinship and alliance had been damaged since Bismarck's time by commercial and colonial rivalry. Lately wider divergences had appeared. The young Kaiser sought to play on the young Tsar. England, under Lord Rosebery, refused to join with France, Russia and Germany in coercing Japan. A few months later, Lord Salisbury's great plan for uniting the Powers against Turkish misrule in Armenia and the Balkans by demarcating respective spheres of inheritance in case of the Sick Man's unpreventible demise, was loathed in Berlin. With heady impulse the Emperor William II. regarded that provident policy as a Mephistophelian scheme for partitioning the Ottoman Empire to the detriment of the Triple Alliance and for the profitable reconciliation of England with Russia.[1] This was one cause of ill-humour and suspicion on the German side, but the South African question became the nail working up in the shoe.

Earlier in the year 1895, as long ago as February, under the Rosebery Government, our Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Edward Malet, instructed by the Liberal Government, remonstrated against German meddling with the Transvaal—a question for England not less vital than Egypt. The Wilhelmstrasse retorted its flat opposition to any federation, whether political or commercial, of British South Africa with the Boer States. After the Unionists came in, Sir Edward Malet, in the middle of October —when the Drifts crisis was bound to come to war unless Pretoria gave way—pointed out that German encouragement of Boer hostility towards England might lead to grave complications.

[1] Erich Brandenburg, *Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege*, pp. 44-48.

Baron von Marschall, with the Kaiser's annotating applause, roundly defended Germany's right to support President Kruger. Retreat from that position would spread a storm of indignation throughout the Reich. "England may well reflect whether she possesses so many friends in the world that she can afford lightly to break with Germany."[1] Next William II. met our military attaché, Colonel Swaine, and assailed him with a hail of reproaches on British conduct in general. His convulsive Majesty closed the colloquy or harangue with an emphatic warning. England had fallen into her present state of total isolation because of her "policy of selfishness and bullying". She could only escape from her plight by open, uncompromising adhesion to the Triple Alliance—or by equal decision in the opposite sense.[2] Some day this rash tongue would be taken at its word.

Never before had Britain been addressed by Germany in this threatening tone. Partly real was the Kaiser's excitement, and partly calculated. He meant to use this Transvaal affair. He misrepresented Malet as mentioning "the incredible word 'war' and that for the sake of a few square miles full of negroes and palm trees". Salisbury, needless to say, disavowed the horrific suggestion, which Malet denied having made. But the Kaiser's further marginal note was fateful. "We must make capital vigorously out of this affair for eventual naval increases to protect our growing trade."[3] From this time to the end of the year William II. and his naval confidants were engaged with ideas of strengthening the German fleet and stirring the backward state of public opinion.[4]

So much world-history was in the making in connection with South Africa in months well before the Raid and the Kruger telegram.

IV

At this of all moments came the one worst thing imaginable—the risk of war with the United States, simultaneously with South African unrest and German ill-will.

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. pp. 5-7, Memorandum by Baron von Marschall, October 15, 1895. The Kaiser's marginal note exclaimed against "making us responsible for the arrogance (*Uberhebung*) of Rhodes".

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 8-11, William II. to Marschall, October 25, 1895.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 12.

[4] Hans Hallmann, *Krügerdepesche und Flottenfrage*, pp. 30-34.

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Many still living remember like yesterday with what stupefaction the Venezuelan ultimatum was received when launched by President Cleveland a week before Christmas. To the vast majority of persons the strain on Anglo-German relations and the scope of the Transvaal problem were unknown. As little were they aware that an ancient dispute about the boundaries between Venezuela and British Guiana might suddenly raise the Monroe doctrine. The latter colony was within Chamberlain's province, though the negotiations with Washington were in Lord Salisbury's hands.

For some time nothing had been going well with Anglo-American relations. Venezuela, on the strength of shadowy rights derived from Spain, claimed a great part of British Guiana. Washington had been requesting for a long time, and lately with insistence, that this claim should be submitted to arbitration. The case seemed to successive British Governments preposterous. Lord Rosebery declared most of the disputed territory to be "absolutely an integral portion of British Guiana". Lord Salisbury took the same view. Meanwhile the Venezuelan Government very cleverly gave an American syndicate a concession in the disputed region, described by vivid American journalists as the legendary El Dorado discovered at last. Hence Britain's greedy clutch.

During these latter months Chamberlain was concerned, not with this ugly international controversy concerning British Guiana, but with the domestic affairs of that colony. He found it one of the most backward of the "neglected estates". In successive despatches he insisted that the colony must no longer seek to depend so much on the sugar-fields; urged the necessity of other forms of cultivation and particularly the development of the gold-mining industry; and exerted himself to secure support for the latter purpose. Local opinion remarked of his communications that they were "widely different from the ordinary style of Downing Street correspondence", and "well calculated to form the basis of a friendly relationship between the inhabitants of the Colony and the new Minister".[1] He was as much startled as any man when this one of the many territories under his charge round the globe caused an earthquake

[1] *Demerara Argosy*, November 16, 1895.

which shook the whole English-speaking world and sent vibrations through all the world outside it.

Mr. Cleveland's message to Congress exploded on December 17. Framed with verbal propriety, it was a violent ultimatum in effect. The President would appoint an American Commission to determine the just boundaries of Venezuela—and therefore of a British Colony as well—and would uphold his Commission's award at all costs.

> When such report is made and accepted it will, in my opinion, be the duty of the United States to resist by every means in its power, as a wilful aggression upon its rights and interests, the appropriation by Great Britain of any lands, or the exercise of governmental jurisdiction over any territory, which, after investigation, we have determined of right to belong to Venezuela. In making these recommendations I am fully alive to the full responsibility incurred, and keenly realise all the consequences that may follow.[1]

Falling so plump and plumb, this was a thing without example in diplomacy. To British opinion it seemed both wicked and inexplicable. But prodigious misunderstanding led to a ludicrous paradox. President Cleveland threatened war because of our supposed national refusal to arbitrate; but when public opinion on this side knew what the quarrel was about the overwhelming sense of Great Britain demanded arbitration.

Chamberlain combined championship of a colony with abhorrence of Cleveland's method. But he was determined to move heaven and earth to avert conflict between the two English-speaking peoples, his own country and his wife's. "The Americans", he said repeatedly, "are not people to run away from", adding with a touch all his own, "In fact, I do not know any people from whom we can afford to accept a kicking".[2] He set himself to discover a policy which would neither show the white feather nor flaunt a red rag. For weeks he allowed hardly a day to pass without letters and interviews in the endeavour to find a way out.

In the end, months afterwards, he was to have no minor share in the settlement. That part of it must be left for a later chapter. Our concern here is with the immense aggravation of Britain's

[1] *The Times*, December 18, 1895. [2] To Selborne, December 24, 1895.

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general difficulties brought about by the Venezuelan manifesto during the irreparable days of the next fortnight before the Raid.

Our age nearly forty years after forgets the momentary blackness of that passing cloud. On our side there was desperate talk of Sikhs and Ghurkas for British Guiana as well as of wider aspects of defence. On the other side, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Henry Cabot Lodge, "Our peace-at-any-price-men, if they only knew it, are rendering war likely, because they will encourage England to persist; in the long run this means a fight. Personally I rather hope the fight will come soon. The clamour of the peace faction has convinced me that this country needs a war."[1] Let no one dream that the emotions of what is called Imperialism were confined to Britain.

V

The Cleveland ultimatum, though met with steady calmness and judgment by the British people as a whole, exposed the complete nakedness of Britain's isolation in the world. The Sultan was encouraged to kill more Armenians; the German Emperor exhilarated; President Kruger edified before Providence. The Uitlanders were weakened and divided by the possible jeopardy of Britain's own position and by those amongst them whose natural feelings were predominantly pro-American or pro-German. The original dream of revolution was ruined by the disappearance of confident impulse.

For some days the Colonial Secretary is intent on securing from his department a thorough statement of the Guiana case. But far more than ever does he feel the need for an effort to bring about something like a "world settlement", as it would now be called.

On the appropriate date of Christmas Eve, he wrote to Hatfield an epistle which must be called romantic and emotional. We note it here because it was the last of its kind. In New England as in Old England there was a movement of humanitarian and religious protest against the Armenian massacres. He asked the Prime Minister whether a strong appeal based on recent reports of the horrors might not bring about joint naval action

[1] *Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge*, vol. i. pp. 204-205.

by Britain and America to quell the Sultan. This crusade overpowering ill-feeling on other matters, Venezuela and all, might once more prove that "blood is thicker than water".[1]

Lord Salisbury knew that though blood is thicker than water, water when there is enough of it is stronger than blood. With bland irony he pointed out the naval, military and political impossibilities.[2]

At least Chamberlain was trying to do something. His thoughts were working in all directions. Nothing could change his feeling that something uncommon ought to be attempted. Why not try to improve relations with France despite the Egyptian feud? He held—and there he was nearer the Prime Minister's own reveries—that we should seek to settle direct with Russia. Why not let her have Constantinople and in concert with her finally liquidate the bankrupt estate of the "sick man"? "If we failed we would be no worse off", as he put it later; "if we succeed we might deal with France afterwards without the slightest difficulty."[3] He had long desired an improvement of Anglo-German relations. That cause was soon to look hopeless for a while.

VI

Impending events in South Africa and Germany were about to change his whole future and the world's. We must next see how the Venezuela crisis played no small part in giving an impish turn to Transvaal affairs. The Uitlanders were led through doubt and hesitation to fatality.

The evidence is a set of documents written from day to day and little intended to be remarkable. Paying close attention to dates we must follow the chronicle.

On Monday, December 9th, the Colonial Secretary went to Highbury and stayed there for three weeks. The boxes attended him and he was in constant touch with his staff. He had been "working like a Trojan", as his wife put it, and wanted an interval for thought even more than for rest.

On December 16, Sir Robert Meade, in a budget of news,

[1] December 24, 1895, Chamberlain to Salisbury.

[2] January 6, 1896, Salisbury to Chamberlain.

[3] Chamberlain to Salisbury, December 24, 1895.

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reported Miss Flora Shaw's account of her interview with Dr. Leyds on his way to Europe.[1] "Montagu White told her that when he was in Germany all the Germans (not official persons) assured him that he might rely on German help if England interfered on behalf of the Uitlanders. . . . She told me there has been an important series of articles in the *Gaulois* saying that whatever happens in the Transvaal nothing can be allowed to take place to the benefit of England." Meade adds on his own account that the military authorities are considering whether another troop-ship ought to be diverted to Cape Town for precaution, and remarks, "I hear that the intention of the Uitlanders to force a solution is all over the place, and *The Times* of to-day as good as announces it".[2] More. The permanent Under-Secretary encloses a memorandum from Fairfield, who had sent for Rochfort Maguire to find out confidentially what was afoot in the Rhodes camp.

CROSS-CURRENTS IN JOHANNESBURG

16.12.95.—Mr. Maguire called on me to-day. He said that his information was that nothing would happen before the New Year—that the first step would probably be a deputation to Pretoria making demands, which would be refused. On the return to Johannesburg there would be a public mass meeting, which after several adjournments, and after excitement had been worked up to fever heat might resolve itself into a Declaration of Independence or of a refusal to recognise the existing Government. All alike think the actual upsetting of the present Government the easiest part of the job,

They fear the intervention of Germany in some form; and hope that the British Government will find some way of making her observe the rule of "hands off".

Maguire will know more in a few days and will see me again. He is rather inclined to think that in saying that nothing will happen *before*

[1] Compare Flora Shaw to Rhodes (December 12, 1895): "Delay dangerous sympathy now complete but will depend very much upon action before European powers give time to enter a protest which as European situation considered serious might paralyse Government: general feeling in the Stock market very suspicious" (Select Committee Report, Appendix, C.311–I, p. 598).

[2] On this date a strong though short leading article in *The Times* said: "The time is past, even in South Africa, when a helot system of administration, organised for the exclusive advantage of a privileged minority, can long resist the force of enlightened public opinion".

the New Year, his Cape friends may mean that it will happen a good deal after the New Year. He has to do with companies which are not in the Rhodes group, and the managers of those companies do not seem to expect any *immediate* crisis. Dr. Harris will be at the Cape to-morrow or next day, and developments of the situation are likely to follow.

There must be a *plebiscite* if the rising is successful, but someone will stick up the Union Jack in hopes that it may stay up. There will be no fight on that, but sooner or later the New State will federate under the Union Jack. E. F.[1]

Thus Highbury received contradictory accounts. Revolution is notoriously imminent; revolution may be indefinitely postponed. There are political differences between rival capitalists.

Cleveland's ultimatum, as we saw, was published on Wednesday, December 18, and the world rang with it to Britain's hurt. At the Colonial Office, Sir Robert Meade felt the full shock of first impressions on that staggering day. He supposed that, in view of the redoubled difficulty of the foreign situation, something ought to be attempted to postpone a rising at Johannesburg. Thereupon, the permanent Under-Secretary sent post-haste to Birmingham an embarrassing communication:

SIR R. MEADE TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Colonial Office, December 18.—I propose to hold over the telegram to Robinson as to Dr. Leyds's supposed intrigues till I hear again from you, as, when you directed it to be sent, you had not seen President Cleveland's Message. Perhaps as we shall have to face German opposition you may wish the Uitlander movement to be postponed for a year or so. Fairfield thinks he could get this done through Maguire . . . but if the movement is to be postponed it must be done at once. Fairfield is confident he could do this without compromising you—should you wish it to be done. He thinks that there are not many of the important men who are heartily in favour of this movement, though if rushed by Rhodes they will no doubt join actively. If it takes place there will probably be a "slump" in the South African mining market, which joined on to a more general "slump" on account of an apprehended quarrel with the U.S. may produce a serious crisis in the City. . . .

This was a poser such as even Chamberlain in his life of hazard

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

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seldom had to meet. He replied to the Colonial Office in bold terms and gave shrewd reasons. Let the Uitlander revolt come at once or be put off "for a year or two at least". If long postponement cannot be assured—"then the responsibility must rest with Rhodes and we had better abstain even from giving advice".

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR ROBERT MEADE

Highbury, December 18.—MY DEAR MEADE—Thanks for your letter. The question is a serious one to decide.

It must be noted that the American affair cannot become serious for some time. First they have to get the assent of the Senate—then appoint a Commission—then make enquiry—and then? Suppose they decide that the line to the Essequibo is Venezuelan. Will they tell us to evacuate, and declare war if we do not ?

As long as the Venezuelans do not attack us we shall not attack them. Altogether it must be months before there is a real crisis.

Now as to Transvaal. Might it not come off just at the critical time if it is postponed now? The longer it is delayed the more chance there is of foreign intervention.

It seems to me that either it should come *at once* or be postponed for a year or two at least. Can we ensure this?

If not we had better not interfere, for we may bring about the very thing we want to avoid.

If Fairfield can make the situation clear to Maguire I should like him to do so—then the responsibility must rest with Rhodes and we had better abstain even from giving advice. I again repeat, the *worst* time for trouble anywhere would be about 6 months hence. I cannot say that any time would be a good one, but can the difficulty be indefinitely postponed?[1]

When these words of discriminating audacity were received at the Colonial Office, Fairfield saw Rhodes's confidant and

[1] This clears up another matter long in dispute. We see by how much Chamberlain's views in Birmingham differ from an impression of them gained in London and telegraphed to Cape Town—Flora Shaw to Rhodes, December 17, 1895: "Held an interview with Secretary, Transvaal, left here on Saturday for Hague, Berlin, Paris, fear in negotiation with these parties. Chamberlain sound in case of interference European Powers but have special reason to believe wishes you must do it immediately" (Select Committee, Appendix, H.C.311–I, p. 598).

reported that for reasons good and bad the impetus of the Johannesburg movement could not now be stayed. Amiable and ready as was Fairfield, this next letter like others suggests more lightness than steadiness of mind. He was very deaf, and this may have caused some incidental misunderstandings, but Chamberlain described him afterwards as "a man whom I believe to have been absolutely honourable, absolutely truthful".

FAIRFIELD TO CHAMBERLAIN

Colonial Office (*Secret*), *December* 19, '95.—Maguire called this afternoon. His cable advices are that Johannesburg will begin to "move" in about ten days.

It is now too late to defer action for a year, as Johannesburg is so full of bad characters, for whom there is no legitimate employment, that nothing can be done to keep them quiet, except to set them fighting. . . . The capitalists have, in fact, lost control of the situation. Maguire and his friends here were already impressed with the disadvantages of postponing action for a few months, and are urging early action. . . .

The transport leaves the West Indies on the 21st. Shall we tell the War Office and Admiralty to-morrow that *after the first day we wish her to steam her fastest* for the Cape? If so please send me a wire early to-morrow.

There is nothing else to be done, unless you wish some preparations to be made at Bombay. Meade left before Maguire arrived.

P.S.—Maguire says that South African values have now reached a (downward) point at which it is thought by the best authorities in the City that the news of a row can have no other than a favourable effect.

Fairfield's private statement months later to his chief was, "I used every argument I could think of to secure indefinite postponement"; but at the end of the arguments he did say that if an early Uitlander outbreak were inevitable, "the sooner it came off the better".[1]

It was in the sense of the latter phrase that Maguire cabled to Cape Town. He sent this message on December 20. The same night it reached Groote Schuur, where Alfred Beit and Harris, just landed from England, were staying with Rhodes. Beit

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

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at once telegraphed to Lionel Phillips "urging instant flotation new Company" by the Johannesburgers.[1] Chamberlain more than a year after made a marginal comment: "I have no doubt that Beit and Harris were influenced by Maguire's telegram". They might well, and not only they.

VII

Under which flag? In any case that issue for a free Johannesburg must have arisen. But it was hurried and aggravated by the Cleveland ultimatum, added to German hostility. Britain might have enough to do to look after herself. This new situation strongly favoured the mixed elements amongst the reformers who either had no natural love for the Union Jack or thought it wiser to adopt the Vierkleur in the hope of securing after the revolt sufficient Boer adhesion to steady the State.[2]

This squabble—though personal and business rivalries played a part in it—turned on no unworthy nor inconsiderable motive. But from the moment the controversy on the flag became acute, the reform movement was doomed to ruin by irresolution and delay. The iron heart of conspiracy, prepared indeed to do or die, never had been in it. Bloodless victory had been its pleasing dream.

Chamberlain's opinion about the right flag for the new era could not be in doubt. He distrusted the cosmopolitan magnates of Johannesburg, and was convinced that a "New Republic" under their control would be worse for the Transvaal, South Africa and the Empire than Kruger's regime with all its gross defects.

I have never at any time concealed my opinion that whatever defects may exist in the present form of government of the Transvaal the substitution of an entirely independent Republic governed by, or for, the capitalists of the Rand would be very much worse both for British interests in the Transvaal itself and for British influence in South Africa. I have expressed this opinion in conversation to the Consul-General

[1] Cape Committee Report on Jameson Raid, C.8380, 1897, p. 194: "From Harris, Cape Town, to Jameson, Pitsani. December 21st, 1895. A. Beit has telegraphed Lionel Phillips urging instant flotation new Company. I have telegraphed also to Col. F. W. Rhodes same effect. . . ."

[2] Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within*, p. 127.

of the South African Republic and to many other gentlemen, and it is quite possible that I may have mentioned it to Lord Grey.[1]

Perhaps in his heart he disliked most the thought that the Cape Premier, in addition to his already comprehensive functions within the Empire in South Africa, might become the real though veiled ruler of this new Republic in the Transvaal. Then indeed Proteus changing shape at will might baffle every attempt to cope with him. Again, why should British intervention take place at all in the Transvaal to the possible injury in the long run of the British position? This mood we cannot doubt explains certain celebrated telegrams as well as one of the "missing" series. That series as a whole will be dealt with later. Part of the following colloquy by cable has been quoted in the preceding chapter but is necessary here.

RHODES, HARRIS AND "THE FLAG"

November 5, 1895.—*Harris to Rhodes* [one of the messages not hitherto published].—We have stated positive that results Dr. Jameson's plan include British flag. Is this correct?

[NOTE.—*Dr. Jameson's plan at that time, like the High Commissioner's and subject to the latter, was to intervene after the revolution broke out.*]

November 6.—*Rhodes to Harris.*—As to English flag they must very much misunderstand me at home. I of course would not risk everything as I am doing excepting for British flag.

November 8.—*Harris to Rhodes.*—Thanks they do not misunderstand you but feared if you should have power insist upon it.

November 24.—*Rhodes to Harris.*—Dr. Jameson back from Johannesburg everything right my judgment is it is certainty, we think A. Beit (he) must come with you 29th Nov. on score of health you will be just in time. A. Beit to stay with me here and go up with us and the Governor. . . .[2]

We have followed the sequel on the side of the Colonial Office. The High Commissioner was authorised "to go up" to Pretoria

[1] His memorandum written June 1896. Chamberlain Papers.

[2] For this and the two preceding telegrams see Select Committee Report, Appendix, C.311–I, pp. 594-597.

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and Johannesburg, Rhodes of course accompanying him, in case of insurrection. But the quarrel came to a head amongst the reformers at Johannesburg. Did Rhodes mean to impose the Union Jack? If he did many would abandon the movement. To find out what he meant, Colonel Younghusband of *The Times*, who was trusted by them all, went up to Cape Town. We shall see what happened there; and at Johannesburg when he returned on Christmas morning.[1]

Meanwhile, the Colonial Secretary, knowing nothing yet of the dissension and wavering amongst the reformers, still expected that the revolution would happen in a few days; but that British intervention would follow in an official form and in no other manner; and that Jameson's action would be subject to the High Commissioner's orders.

VIII

We may pause for a quiet glimpse of Christmas at Highbury before we come to the seething up and brimming over of the witches' kettle thousands of miles away. There could not be a more home-loving man than Chamberlain. In his long career of almost incessant combat, surprise and peril there had been a curious lull for months. He had been absorbed by administrative activities and ideas. This time, amongst his family, the Colonial Secretary was in a mood of imaginative optimism.

The household with its American kinships had taken the Venezuelan crisis grievously to heart. In one short week the sane affinity between the best elements in both countries had worked a marvellous change. Across the Atlantic "ten thousand pulpits", as a phrase of the day went, had declared against fratricidal war, and responded to general British advocacy of impartial arbitration. In Wall Street a huge break in prices strengthened the rally for peace and reason. Never in the world were good feeling and common sense more quickly triumphant over a tragedy of open diplomacy. The Colonial Secretary, as we saw, mused on ways to bring England and America shoulder to shoulder, and became impossibly romantic in his dreams of their co-operation on the Armenian question.

[1] Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 267; Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within*, pp. 127-129.

Nor could he help but think how fortune in the course of this year had raised him up from despondency to the foretop of the State. Nine months before, loss of money and political vexations had inclined him to abandon public life, when he wrote, "it seems as though the luck had left us entirely".[1]

That Christmas Day fell on a Wednesday. Next Saturday night—if all went as his latest information assumed—Johannesburg would be up in arms. Next Sunday the High Commissioner according to programme would be on his way to the scene of revolution. Sir Hercules, if he thought fit, would call on Jameson and his men to aid order during the transition. These would be supported if necessary by British regular troops. A Constituent Assembly, elected by all adult males in the Transvaal, Boers as well as Uitlanders, would decide upon the new form of government. Chamberlain hoped for South African federation before long and under the British flag. But upon the Constituent Assembly would depend the adoption in the Transvaal of the Union Jack or the Vierkleur.

IX

We have by no means done with the cheerful season at Highbury. To understand what happened there in a few days we must turn to the growing confusions at Johannesburg.

Colonel Younghusband on his mission to clear up the flag question arrived at Groote Schuur on December 22. Rhodes himself remarked, "All right, if they won't go into it they won't, and I shall wire to Jameson to keep quiet". But as Younghusband went off with this reassurance the inevitable factotum, Harris, overtook him and said, "Oh, Rhodes says that when any rising takes place it must be under the British flag".[2] Younghusband returned to Johannesburg on Christmas morning. His report threw all the ringleaders into perplexity and the majority into angry dismay. Later on that Christmas Day two of their principal men left for Cape Town to seek an absolute assurance from Rhodes that the Imperial flag would not be imposed. They had no sooner taken the train than a complete change of plan began to be discussed by the rest. First, the rising had been fixed to

[1] Vol. II. of this work, pp. 623-631.

[2] Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 267.

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begin on Saturday night, December 28, with the seizure of Pretoria fort and arsenal, known to be weakly guarded. Then the adventure had been put off for a week to Saturday night, January the 4th. And now a retreating spirit welcomed further delay in the name of preparation. It meant indefinite postponement.

All possible objections to action took larger shape, as happens in these moments when innate irresolution seeks plausible disguises. On Christmas night in Johannesburg the nerve, nay, the life, was out of the conspiracy. Next day it was resolved to send special messengers to inform Jameson about the misery of the flag dispute and about the "condition of unpreparedness", and to adjure him by heaven and earth not to move until called.[1]

The information of the Colonial Office was a day behind the South African facts. On Boxing Day Chamberlain's latest intelligence moved him to warn the Prime Minister that a Transvaal crisis would arise in a few days. The letter is another proof that the Government as a whole were at one with the Colonial Secretary's policy:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Highbury, December 26, 1895.—My dear Salisbury, I have received private information that a rising in Johannesburg is imminent and will probably take place in the course of the next few days.

The state of affairs in the Transvaal has been threatening trouble of this kind for some time, and I have given secret instructions to Sir Hercules Robinson, after consulting him by letter, how to act in an emergency.

The War Office has arranged that two regiments, one from Bombay, and one from Barbadoes, shall call at the Cape about the middle of January. I think the outbreak will be at the end of this month, but we have, of course, our usual garrison at the Cape, and Rhodes has the Bechuanaland Police.

There is nothing more to be done but to watch the event, which we have done nothing to provoke. If the rising is successful it ought to turn to our advantage.

Within another twenty-four hours the news was clean contrary—anti-climax and bathos.

[1] Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within*, pp. 129-130.

That Friday evening, December 27th, brought a message, from the Colonial Office to Highbury, that the Uitlanders' affair was no longer soaring but deflated. The gas was out of that balloon. Chamberlain waited for confirmation. It came in the shape of a telegram from Sir Hercules Robinson:

I learn on good authority movement at Johannesburg has collapsed. Internal divisions have led to the complete collapse of the movement, and leaders of the National Union will now probably make the best terms they can with President Kruger.[1]

As afterwards appeared, this obituary announcement through the High Commissioner derived from Rhodes himself. He had just seen the anxious emissaries from Johannesburg. They were relieved by his "perfectly satisfactory assurance" that the Union Jack would not be thrust upon them, but they made it clear enough to him that the original plans of the reformers had been abandoned.[2] Then Rhodes sent for Sir Graham Bower, the Imperial Secretary at the Cape, and said, "You will be glad to hear that the revolution at Johannesburg has fizzled out like a damp squib".[3] This was Saturday, December 28. The High Commissioner's communication did not reach Chamberlain until next day—a Sunday destined to be for ever notorious.

Without delay he wrote again to the Prime Minister (December 29):

I think that the Transvaal business is going to fizzle out. Rhodes has miscalculated the feeling of the Johannesburg capitalists, and it is now quite possible that Kruger will make some concessions, in which case the affair would be terminated for the present at any rate.

So smooth may seem the calm before the cyclone.

X

The scene shifts again. This time to Jameson's camp.

On Boxing Day, he received from his own brother, Sam, in Johannesburg a warning to hold his hand. "It is absolutely necessary to postpone flotation . . . you must not move until

[1] Blue Book, C.7933, 1896, No. 3, p. 2.

[2] Fitzpatrick, *Transvaal from Within*, p. 131; Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, pp. 267, 268.

[3] Select Committee Report, 311, p. 140. Sir Graham Bower questioned by Mr. Secretary Chamberlain.

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you have received instructions to. . . ."[1] Let us see, first, how dissensions and entreaties badgered him from day to day, and then how the medical man turned captain of horse, hardened in contempt and temerity. He was a Scotsman, and he became "fey".

The argot of the conspiracy beggars satire. "Polo" though not good was better than "flotations", "shareholders", "subscribers" and the rest of the jobbers' jargon. One reformer on whom the Doctor had relied wired to him: "Experts' report decidedly adverse, I absolutely condemn further developments at present".[2] Many other messages in the same sense arrived. But what of Rhodes? An absolute prohibition from him personally would have deterred the straining moss-trooper on the Transvaal border. That veto never came. But Rhodes's man, Dr. Harris, did telegraph at the last that "you and we must judge regarding flotation but all our foreign friends are now dead against it and say public will not subscribe one penny towards it even with you as a director. Ichabod!"[3]

We see Jameson through these three days of adjurations and laments. He was not a subtle man. There was nothing of Hamlet in him but much of Fortinbras without the trained soldiership or the bannered army. We can see him setting his attractive and hardy face—compressing his rather full but self-willed lips, lifting a little more his high eyebrows, and, with his uncommonly wide-apart eyes, beholding nothing real but only his dream of Clive-like achievement. He was no Clive, for he had only the daring without the genius. Even in his Matabele campaign against savages his lack of precaution had to be corrected by others.[4]

You may call him a puppet of fatalism, or you may say that it was a case of the moth and the light. His set mind speaks in his own words to Harris just before his gamble.[5]

Friday, December 27.— . . . They have then two days for flotation. If they do not we will make our own flotation with help of letter which I will publish. . . .

[1] December 26, 1895, Cape Committee Report, C.8380, 1897, p. 195.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 196. J. H. Hammond to Jameson, December 27, 1895.
[3] December 28, 1895. *Ibid.* p. 198.
[4] Lord Buxton, *Journal of the African Society*, April 1931, p. 115.
[5] Cape Committee Report, p. 285.

On the day before the plunge, he wired to Harris, that is, to Rhodes, "Received your telegram Ichabod. . . . Unless I hear definitely to the contrary shall leave to-morrow evening . . . and it will be all right."[1] He seems to have sent this for form's sake and cannot have expected a veto from Cape Town, for next, early in the afternoon of this same Saturday, he telegraphed to his brother in Johannesburg, "I shall start without fail to-morrow night".[2]

XI

At Highbury on the Sunday morning Chamberlain little knew that his political life was never again to be the same. He had no sooner sent to Hatfield the news of the fizzling out at Johannesburg than he received the most unexpected of all Fairfield's letters. That official hinted portents. With amazement the Colonial Secretary read that Jameson might take the bit between his teeth.

FAIRFIELD TO CHAMBERLAIN

Colonial Office, [Saturday] December 28.—Rhodes and others at Cape Town have evidently been reckoning without their host at Johannesburg. Mr. Albu who makes the strong anti-revolutionary speech (see this morning's papers) is a wealthy naturalised German Jew. His principal concern is the Meyer and Charlton Mine, one of the best of the dividend payers. I met Hawksley, the Company's solicitor, last night, who said that he and his friends were being much chaffed in the city about the "fizzle" of their revolution. *He seemed to think that Rhodes (whom he does not much like) might be driven into an attitude of frenzy and unreason, and order Dr. Jameson to "go in" from Gaberones with the Company's police and manipulate a revolution,*[3] but Maguire, who has just been here, says that this is absurd. The general opinion in the City is that Kruger will now make the necessary reforms. Personally Maguire thinks that he is too old and stiff in the joints to do this. It would, however, be a "score" indeed, if, like Khama, he were to say, "I will do nothing for Rhodes but anything for Mr. Chamberlain". Were the Company's police to go in filibustering it would be a breach of Article 22 of their Charter which you might feel bound to stop under Article 8.

[1] Cape Committee Report, p. 287.
[2] Fitzpatrick, *Transvaal from Within*, p. 132.
[3] These italics are the biographer's.

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That Jameson might "go in filibustering" still seemed a wild improbability, yet against it Chamberlain meant to make assurance doubly sure. Instantly on receiving this suggestion of the incredible he ordered the Colonial Office to send to Sir Hercules Robinson a telegram hitherto thought ambiguous, but here very simply explained:

CHAMBERLAIN TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Sunday, December 29. (*Strictly Confidential.*) *Secretary of State to the High Commissioner.*—It has been suggested, although I do not think it probable, that an endeavour might be made to force matters at Johannesburg to a head by someone in the service of the Company advancing from the Bechuanaland Protectorate with police. Were this to be done I should have to take action under Articles 22 and 8 of the Charter. Therefore, if necessary, but not otherwise, remind Rhodes of these Articles and intimate to him that in your opinion he would not have my support, and point out the consequences which would follow.[1]

The masterful warning incensed Rhodes unreasonably.[2] But it reached South Africa too late.

XII

Here may come the record of a conversation some years ago between the present writer and the gifted woman who played no inconsiderable part:[3]

J. L. G.: "Tell me. You were closely associated with the Colonial Office. What is the truth? Did Chamberlain know about the Raid?"

F. L.: "No. He knew about the preparations in view of an explosion on the Rand, but in conspiracy to make an explosion he had no part."

J. L. G.: "Why did contrary impressions exist in the minds of Rhodes and Jameson?"

F. L. "In the autumn of 1895 I spoke to Rutherfoord Harris about the gathering of an armed force in the corridor of Bechuanaland, skirting

[1] Correspondence on . . . Recent Disturbances in the South African Republic, C.7933, 1896, No. 2.

[2] *December* 30, 1895.—*Rhodes to Flora Shaw.*—"Inform Chamberlain that I shall get through all right if he supports me but he must not send cable like he sent to High Commissioner in South Africa. To-day the crux is, I will win and South Africa will belong to England" (Select Committee Report, Appendix, 311–I, p. 599).

[3] Lady Lugard, then Miss Flora Shaw, chief writer on Colonial questions in *The Times*.

the western Transvaal. Harris said, 'The trouble in Johannesburg must break out; we must be ready to go in to the help of the Uitlanders if need be. It's all right. Chamberlain knows all about it.' I said I would speak to him about it, but Harris said in alarm, 'Oh, you mustn't do that: it's absolutely confidential'. So I didn't speak to Mr. Chamberlain."

J. L. G.: "Where do you place Dr. Harris?"

F. L.: "Harris was the mischief-maker of the whole affair. When the Raid Enquiry was being held he said that 'Chamberlain must have known about it because Flora must have told him'. On hearing this I went to him and said, 'Why do you tell that untruth?' He answered, 'Because no woman keeps a secret: if you tell her not to tell, she will'."

J. L. G.: "About then I think you did speak to the Colonial Secretary."

F. L.: "Yes, then I did go to the great man himself. I said to him, 'It is absolutely necessary for me to know the truth.[1] I put you on your honour to answer me. Did you know about the Raid beforehand or not?'

"Chamberlain said, 'You put me on my honour. Very well. The fact is I can hardly say what I knew and what I did not. I did not want to know too much. Of course I knew of the precautions, the preparations, if you like, in view of the expected trouble in Johannesburg, but I never could have imagined that Jameson would take the bit between his teeth.'

" 'Then you did not know about the Raid?'—'I did not.' "

J. L. G.: "How do you account for Jameson?"

F. L.: "He was at that moment a mixture of Imperialist idealism and swelled head. You must look at it as it appeared before the plunge. His men were tired of waiting. The Uitlanders appeared to be nervous and afraid. He thought, 'Why wait any longer for the Uitlanders to make the revolution? We must make it ourselves.' So Dr. Jim chanced it and went to his fate."

This evidence bears the stamp of truth. Dr. Jameson was misled by no one but himself. False confidence miscalculated every single factor, moral and material. Nothing could lead any cool man to imagine that an invasion of the Transvaal against the will of the Uitlanders was or could be approved by any Colonial Secretary or by any British Government. What determined him was a fixity of infatuation. Was it not common talk that the Boers were no longer the fighters of old? They had never met a mounted force with machine-guns. He would be

[1] In view of her coming appearance before the Commission of Enquiry.

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in Johannesburg before they could muster. If he succeeded he would be the hero of the Empire. Not even a fleeting doubt of fortune seems to have crossed his mind. To those who knew the quiet, judicious, engaging man he became afterwards, Dr. Jameson's megalomania on the eve of the Raid remains a psychological mystery. The next chapter will show that there is no other mystery.

CHAPTER LI

THE RAID CHANGES THE WORLD—CRISIS AND ENQUIRY—A LONG BATTLE

(1895–1897)

JAMESON'S Madness—Chamberlain's Wrath—"If it succeeds it will ruin me"—His Trenchant Action—Doubtful Days and Jingo Attacks—The Fiasco and his Vindication—The Kruger Telegram—Fate of the Uitlanders—Chamberlain's National Popularity—Meeting of Parliament and a Famous Speech—Rhodes Struggles to Suppress Parliamentary Enquiry—Chamberlain and "Blackmail"—His Offers to Resign—Support of his Colleagues—Rhodes in London: A Momentous Interview—The Enquiry: Its Scenes and the Report—The Telegrams not Produced—Chamberlain's Acquittal—"My Answer is my Action."

I

THAT night of Sunday, December 29, entered into the destiny of continents, dynasties and peoples; and had its share in making more history than mankind has yet finished with. Chamberlain's warning against a Raid was dispatched from Whitehall at half-past five in the afternoon. Before it reached the High Commissioner the thing had happened. It was like the fascinated impulse of the homicides in Dostoieffsky.

Early that morning the second of the two dissuasive messengers from Johannesburg arrived at Jameson's quarters. This was his friend Major Maurice Heany, who had told the Reformers' Committee, "He will come in as sure as fate". Heany felt the futility of his journey. "I am going in", said Jameson.

His camp of Pitsani Potlugo was a speck in drab space. In the afternoon he mustered his few hundreds at hand, and told them that they would soon be joined on the road by the smaller but more seasoned troop of Bechuanaland police from Mafeking.

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The "women and children" letter was read as a pressing invitation, despite the Johannesburg protests that now made its use a moral forgery. The agonising supposition enabled the feather-headed Willoughby, nominally in command, to persuade his fellow-officers that chivalrous rescue was sanctioned by the Imperial authorities.[1] It was the parody of St. George and the dragon.

At half-past six in the evening, the Pitsani column, some 350 "strong", with its six Maxim guns and one 12½-pounder field-piece, trotted away. In a matter of minutes they entered the Transvaal. They went on through the night. At dawn or so they were joined by the Mafeking men, 120 "strong", who brought two Maxims and two 7-pounders. This total force of hardly five hundred filibusters was to overthrow Kruger's Republic and his people of the rifle and the Book.

From the frontier to Johannesburg was something over 180 miles. Our fumbling adventurers counted on covering the distance in less than sixty hours going day and night. They were to be longer on the way. Depots at intervals ahead had been stored on commercial pretexts by a plausible agent, but the arrangements for picking up remounts failed, and, towards the last, rations gave out. Instead of knowing every foot of the routes and how to turn if jeopardised, they were vague topographers. Although they knew the Boers to be restless and suspicious, they never reckoned with the swiftness of the Boer commando system, or with Boer skill in taking position. Never was a presumptuous attempt more improvident in execution. That no ineptitude might be omitted, someone unknown bundled in with the baggage a dispatch-box filled with compromising documents. As some were in code, the key-book was included.

II

On Tuesday morning, the last day of 1895, the High Commissioner's pursuing messenger, on a fast horse, after a mighty ride, overtook the raiders with a dispatch ordering them back

[1] Willoughby afterwards asserted that Dr. Jameson told him the expedition "was undertaken with the knowledge and assent of the Imperial authorities". Willoughby to Sir R. Buller, from Holloway Prison, September 18, 1896 (Chamberlain Papers).

in the Queen's name. This followed Chamberlain's peremptory instructions. It was a hard blow to Jameson, but he was half-way. The ignominy and hazard of turning back seemed the worse evil. He pushed on to his fate. As early as Christmas Eve, Herff, the German Consul at Pretoria, telegraphed to the Wilhelmstrasse that the Boer Government was taking its measures against disturbances at Johannesburg.[1] Two days later President Kruger used his Aesopian parable: "Let the tortoise put out its head". The raiders had bungled even in cutting the telegraph wires to the Transvaal capital. A drunken trooper cut a wire fence instead. Or so runs a story, symbolically if not literally true.[2]

Well before the invaders had gone a day's journey news of them reached Pretoria. Instantly, old General Joubert sent round the country summoning the burghers. As instantly, when the call came, every farmer slung his cartridge belt over his shoulder, put food in his pocket and rode off. Knowing every nook and coign of the country, the commandos collected with marvellous celerity. In twenty-four hours they were hovering warily all round Jameson's column.

New Year's Day dawned on the jaded cavalcade. Instead of reaching Johannesburg in the morning, Jameson found himself in the afternoon still a few miles from Krugersdorp; and in face of the sterile scene where his hopes were to die. From a ridge he looked into a bare valley. At the bottom of it a broad stream flowed across his line of march. Beyond this watercourse his road climbed a long, slow, stony rise. Some way up that slope a stoutly walled enclosure commanded the crossing of the stream. At the top the battery-house of the Queen's mine formed another Boer fortification.[3] The road onward was naked to enveloping fire. The concealed defenders were three times the puny troop of the invaders. With deadly judgment the Boers had made their dispositions. Willoughby brought his artillery into action, but with little effect. All thought of carrying the opposite heights and forcing the direct way forward soon seemed hopeless. The raiders swerved to the right, with the intention

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. p. 15.

[2] Hugh Marshall Hole, *The Jameson Raid*, p. 152; *"The Times" History of the War in South Africa*, vol. i. p. 166.

[3] Ian Colvin, *Life of Jameson*, vol. ii. p. 79; H. M. Hole, *The Jameson Raid*, p. 181.

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of reaching Johannesburg by a circumventing track reported clear. It was a luckless manœuvre. They found themselves compelled to bivouac on the night of a bad New Year's Day. During that night the Boers, growing in numbers, felt sure of their prey.

Next day, January 2, was the end. In the early morning, Jameson, Willoughby and their men still had some hope of working round so as to reach before evening Johannesburg, so near and so far. A running fight for ten miles led them into a worse plight. They were finally trapped and taken. The Boers—they too by now had Maxims and field-pieces—held the steep kopje of Doornkop and otherwise commanded all approaches. From unassailable ground they could shoot down the filibusters. For Jameson and his men there was no escape, back or forward. The troopers were exhausted by hunger, want of sleep and depression. They had been going for four nights and for nearly four days.

At a quarter past nine in the morning on that second day of the New Year 1896 a white flag was raised by someone on the British side and total surrender followed. The happy Boer Commandant, Piet Cronje, in receiving Willoughby's surrender, promised in writing to "spare the lives of you and yours". The casualties on the Boer side were only five killed and three wounded. The raiders had sixteen men killed, about a score severely wounded and others slightly. They had been gallant enough in a common way, but no flash of heroism redeemed the guilt and levity and fatuity of an adventure which dragged England's good name through the dirt and made a scoff of the military repute of British officers. In that respect Doornkop was calamitously regarded by the burghers as confirming Majuba. When known, the course and end of the Jameson Raid aroused the execration and derision of the world.

III

What, meanwhile, was happening at Highbury, Whitehall and Cape Town?

Up to Monday, December 30, Chamberlain's disbelief outweighed uneasiness. Lady Lugard heard a queer tale from the

Wernher-Beit firm and took it to the Colonial Office, whence it was transmitted to Highbury. To the High Commissioner's assurance that the Uitlanders had collapsed, the Colonial Secretary answered, "Are you sure that Jameson has not moved in consequence of collapse?"[1] But this was no sooner sent than official news of the crazy event was received from Sir Hercules Robinson, who added that he had sent a special courier from Mafeking hot-hoof on Jameson's track.

At this the Colonial Office sent its own messenger by fast train to Birmingham.

This was the night of the annual servants' ball at Highbury. It is remembered that when the knowledge of disaster reached him, he did not exclaim, though he clenched his hands. He was about to dress for dinner, but did not. Presently he spoke to some of his family in the room: "If this succeeds, it will ruin me. I am going up to London to crush it." A little thing worth telling is that the Secretary of State, though he had made up his mind to go to London by the last train, would not have the coachman disturbed or the festivities in any way deranged. After dinner he sent the telegram cordially approving the High Commissioner's measures, and adding: "Leave no stone unturned to prevent mischief".[2]

The cab called was late in arriving. It was a cold starlit night. Ready at the door he just caught the train at 12.50 A.M. and reached Prince's Gardens at four in the morning.

When he took command at the Colonial Office he showed that there was nothing on his conscience to make him a coward. The uncertainty resembled what is called the fog of war. He could not yet be sure that Rhodes was not behind Jameson. Rhodes in fact had cabled to Miss Shaw:

> Inform Chamberlain that I shall get through all right if he supports me but he must not send cable like he sent to High Commissioner in South Africa. To-day the crux is, I will win and South Africa will belong to England.[3]

The Colonial Minister was bound to think the Raid a deeper-brained affair than it proved. He could not be sure at all that the

[1] C.7933, No. 4, p. 3. [2] *Ibid.* No. 7, p. 4.
[3] Select Committee, Appendix, p. 599.

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raiders would not reach Johannesburg victoriously and turn the fizzle into a flame. Then "Dr. Jim" would be indeed the hero of the Empire; above all, the hero of the Jingo press and the Conservative mass. Rhodes, though staggered by the adventure, was now hoping desperately for its success.

Here was a test that might well be deadly for Chamberlain. For three days his political life was at stake.

IV

On the last day of the old year he instructed Sir Hercules Robinson to denounce the Raid to Rhodes as "an act of war or rather of filibustering". Were the Chartered Company privy to this "marauding action, Her Majesty's Government would at once have to face a demand that the Charter should be revoked and the Corporation dissolved".[1] In sterner terms, if possible, he sent the same notice to the London directors of the Chartered Company. To President Kruger he wired direct repudiation. To the Prime Minister he wrote:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Colonial Office, December 31, 1895.— . . . This is a flagrant piece of filibustering, for which there is no justification that I can see in the present state of things in the Transvaal. If it were supported by us, it would justify the accusation by Germany and other Powers that having first attempted to get up a revolution in a friendly State and having failed, we had then assented to an act of aggression and, without any grievance of our own, had poured in British troops. It is worth noting that I have no confidence that the force now sent, with its allies in Johannesburg, is strong enough to beat the Boers—and if not we should expect that a conflict would be the beginning of a race war in South Africa. The telegrams herewith will show you how I have dealt with the matter and I hope you will approve. I will call at the Foreign Office to-morrow morning.

The High Commissioner launched a bolt. "Acting on your injunction to leave no stone unturned to prevent mischief I have decided to issue Proclamation." [2] It condemned Jameson

[1] "Correspondence on Recent Disturbances . . .", C.7933, No. 11.
[2] *Ibid.* No. 16. Received January 1.

in the Queen's name and forbade all British subjects to aid or abet him. Chamberlain wrote to his wife that evening:

December 31.— . . . The situation is still obscure. I hope it will come all right. There is no doubt as to the course I must pursue.

On New Year's morning the situation at home was at its worst. Not only was the issue on the veldt still unknown and cable communication blocked. Harris had fabricated a date, December 28th, for the "women and children" letter, and cabled it to *The Times*, where it appeared on January 1. Amidst excited bewilderment the letter came as a masterpiece of cynical trickery in its effect on British sentimentalism. There was a wide revulsion in Jameson's favour. He was no raider, but a chevalier; no filibuster, but a paladin. He was cheered in the music halls, and Jingo sheets with large captions denounced the Colonial Secretary for blundering weakness, and truckling to Kruger, leaving "unarmed English at the mercy of the Boers". Sober organs declared that if Jameson failed it would be because Chamberlain had made himself the saviour of the Boer oligarchy. Not wavering a hair's breadth, he directed the High Commissioner to telegraph to editors of newspapers throughout South Africa asking them to spread the proclamation and to enforce its appeal. It was an instruction as terse and imperative as he or any Minister ever wrote:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR HERCULES ROBINSON

(*Sent* 12.30 *p.m. January* 1, 1896.)—Glad to hear of Rhodes's repudiation of Jameson, who must be mad. . . . Telegraph direct to editors of papers in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein that you, I and Rhodes repudiate Jameson's action and that you are commanded by Her Majesty to enjoin all her subjects in the South African Republic to abstain from aiding or countenancing Jameson or his force, to remain quiet and obey the law and the constitutional authorities, and to avoid tumultuous assemblies or in any manner adding to the excitement. . . . Her Majesty's Government will repudiate Jameson publicly here. . . . Take all steps you may think necessary in this crisis. I have full confidence in your discretion. The chief things are promptitude and vigour.[1]

[1] C.7933, No. 18, p. 9.

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Next day (January 2) censure and disparagement of the Colonial Secretary still raged amongst heady Conservatives. By ill-luck he was attacked by one of his paralysing headaches, and after struggling against it for some hours at the Colonial Office, had to leave for his own house. There about half-past six Sir Robert Meade and others from the Colonial Office appeared with the news of Jameson's catastrophe. One stage was over, but for three days it had been a torturing ordeal like none, perhaps, that he ever went through as a Minister. Late that night he wrote to his wife with excusable satisfaction. What now would the "Jingo papers" say?

> They have been waiting to jump on me. I think I have great cause to congratulate myself that I stood firm and separated myself absolutely from what was a disgraceful exhibition of filibustering. My messengers met Jameson and he refused to turn back—so this is the end.

V

"So this is the end." It was only the beginning. Private felicitations and public applause rained on Chamberlain as the man who had cleared national honour before the world.

But of three thunderclaps in less than three weeks the next was the loudest. The Cleveland manifesto and the Jameson Raid were followed by the Kruger telegram. Humiliated by the news of the Doornkop surrender, the day before, the nation on Friday night had gone to bed in a mood sore, sulky and dispirited. On Saturday morning it was astounded to read that the German Emperor had telegraphed to President Kruger these forever fateful words:

> *Berlin, January* 3, 1896.—I express to you my sincere congratulations that without calling on the aid of friendly Powers you and your people, by your own energy against the armed bands which have broken into your country as disturbers of the peace, have succeeded in re-establishing peace and defending the independence of the country against attacks from without. WILHELM I. R.[1]

By the irreparable folly of this intrusion the Kaiser in his turn became the Dr. Jameson of world diplomacy, attacking, as all

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. pp. 31-32. This telegram is usually quoted imperfectly.

Britain held, the London Convention from the other side; and asserting that right of interference in the Transvaal which Lord Rosebery's Government had repelled.

Then, and for twenty years after, the Germans laboured under one error that nothing could remove. They did not understand, and never yet have understood, the nature and power of political liberty:—that the British people when thoroughly moved is the master of its Government; that in crisis it has a will of its own; that while amiably or indolently inclined to mildness and concession in most foreign and Imperial complications, it is not cowed, but animated by extreme danger. Germany in her turn was amazed by an elemental outburst of British wrath and defiance. A sensational press in the modern sense was not yet known, but "Get Ready", "England Yet", "Hands Off", were the phrases in journals which expressed the unhesitating temper of the country.

National feeling sprang from a sound instinct. Far were the people from knowing what their Government soon learned. The Kruger telegram was no mere flash of Imperial impulse. However foolish, it was an act of State. Remember that Dr. Leyds, the Transvaal envoy, was then in Berlin. The Wilhelmstrasse agreed that the London Convention of 1884 had abolished British suzerainty over the Transvaal. A vivid account is given in extracts from Marschall's diary brought to light in the last few years:

January 3, 1896.—At 10 o'clock Conference with His Majesty, at which Reichskanzler, Hollmann, Knorr and Senden also present. His Majesty develops rather amazing plans. Protectorate over the Transvaal, from which I dissuade him straight away. Mobilisation of the marines. Dispatch of troops to the Transvaal. On the Chancellor's objection that this would be war with England, His Majesty said, "Yes, but only on land". In the end His Majesty, on my proposal, addresses a telegram of congratulation to President Kruger. Joy over the defeat of the Englishmen is universal.[1]

For some days the tension between Berlin and London had been more dangerous than even the Kruger telegram revealed.

[1] See the remarkable article by Friedrich Thimme in *Europäische Gespräche*, Jahrgang 2, 1924, pp. 201 *seq.* This, though too lenient in some passages, is acknowledged to be the most exhaustive investigation of the origins of the Kruger telegram.

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Marschall threatened Lord Salisbury with a Continental coalition which might look at the British Empire for "objects of compensation".[1] The march of a German naval detachment to Pretoria, which would have meant war, was only prevented by the repeated Portuguese refusal of permission to land at Delagoa Bay.[2] Worse still, the German ambassador in London was brusquely ordered to enquire whether the British Government approved the Raid, and if so, to ask for his passports. Hatzfeldt, affrighted, delivered the ultimatum at the Foreign Office, but was able (January 3) to retrieve it because Salisbury was providentially absent.[3] Not Dr. Jameson, nor the less responsible journalists of the hour, were smitten with a madness so far-reaching as that of the Emperor William II.

True that the Wilhelmstrasse lowered its key with dismay when the violence of the storm in Great Britain was known; and when it was clear that France would not renounce Alsace-Lorraine to serve German policy in the Transvaal or elsewhere. The old sceptical Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, in one of his shrewdest ironical letters—in that vein he was as good as Lord Salisbury—poured water into his sovereign's wine, judging that Dr. Leyds and the Hollanders were working for themselves, and that anti-British rashness in the Boer interest would put Germany at the mercy of France and Russia.[4] But following other amateur essays in Mephistophelian temptation, "Willy" of Potsdam had already written to "Nicky" of St. Petersburg, in a crude anti-English sense:

> . . . I have used very severe language in London, and have opened communications with Paris for common defence of our endangered interests, as French and German colonists have immediately joined hands of their own accord to help the outraged Boers. I hope you will also kindly consider the question as it is one of principle of upholding treaties once concluded (January 2).[5]

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. p. 18: "englische Interessen als Kompensationsobjekte zu benutzen" (Marschall in interview with British Ambassador, Memorandum dated December 31, 1895).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 20, footnote.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 19-29 (December 31, 1895, to January 3, 1896).

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 37-39 (Hohenloh to William II., January 7).

[5] Belgian neutrality, for instance, against which the Schlieffen plan—far the most gigantic raid against a neutral in all history—was at that time being elaborated. This letter is from *Briefe Wilhelms II. an den Zaren*, 1894–1914, edited by Professor Dr. Walter Goetz (Berlin, 1920), p. 301.

The Transvaal quarrel was to be made a principal means for working up German popular feeling in favour of a strong fleet and for converting the Reichstag. The method succeeded too well. "It is certain that the monarch was entirely occupied with this idea after the first resonance of the Telegram at home and abroad."[1] Admiral Tirpitz was soon to have his chance. After the Raid, but just before the message to Kruger—which he disapproved—he sent from Kiel the memorable report which foreshadowed the whole future of German naval expansion.[2]

VI

The Liberal Colonial Secretary, mild Lord Ripon, had declared, "The German inclination to take the Transvaal under their protection is a very serious thing. To have them meddling at Pretoria and Johannesburg would be fatal to our position and our influence in South Africa."[3]

Chamberlain of all men could not be of a weaker opinion in face of the Kruger telegram. From the Colonial Office he wrote at once to the Prime Minister:

COLONIAL SECRETARY TO PRIME MINISTER

January 4, 1896.—My dear Salisbury, I think that what is called an "Act of Vigour" is required to soothe the wounded vanity of the nation. It does not much matter which of our numerous foes we defy, but we ought to defy someone.

I suggest a strongly-worded despatch to Germany—to be published as soon as possible—declaring that we will not tolerate any interference with the London Convention and will treat as an act of war any attempt to impair Art. IV to our disadvantage.

2nd—An ostentatious order to commission more ships of war, and (query) the immediate preparation of a force of troops for Cape Town, sufficient to make us masters of the situation in South Africa.

3rd—An appeal to our Colonies to complete their naval and military defences, coupled with the offer to lend them all the money required at Consol rate.

[1] Friedrich Thimme in *Europäische Gespräche* already quoted.

[2] Hans Hallmann, *Krügerdepesche und Flottenfrage*, pp. 34-38.

[3] Letter to Lord Kimberley, Foreign Secretary, November 25, 1894. See Lucien Wolff, *Life of Lord Ripon*, vol. ii. p. 232.

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This would be most important politically. If we are the wealthiest nation in the world, why should we not use our credit occasionally in an emergency like this?

4th—(Query). Make a serious effort to come to terms with America on the lines of Carl Schwartz's proposal to the Chamber of Commerce. He is very influential and fair-minded. He would make an excellent member of the [Venezuelan] Commission.

In fact the Kruger telegram had instantly wiped out in England the bad effect of the Cleveland manifesto. "Yankee-doodle" was cheered in the London theatres, while "Die Wacht am Rhein" was groaned. Returning to the theme the Colonial Minister again urges fervently on Lord Salisbury's imperturbable scepticism that if frank concessions are made to America on the Venezuelan question President Cleveland may be induced to move with Great Britain against the Armenian atrocities. That would be "the greatest coup ever made in English politics".[1] There he was for once a fond visionary, but his more practical idea took effect. Three days after his suggestion of "an ostentatious order to commission more ships of war", the Admiralty formed the famous "flying squadron". That step was no sooner taken, chiefly to put an end as it did to all German hopes of being allowed by the Portuguese to land at Delagoa Bay, than Chamberlain had another idea.

This time, it was the germ of a very great thing. His friend Sir Edwin Arnold of the *Daily Telegraph* had convinced him that Japan was a force of the future, probably a coming great Power, and a friend. Arnold enabled him to inform the Admiralty that Japan, having two battleships building in England, would like nothing better than to show its sympathy "with the British Government at this time" by placing these vessels at our disposal.[2] From this time Chamberlain kept in mind the thought of a Japanese alliance destined one day to end the era of British isolation. So many signs of the future were crowded into these few days.

The Colonial Minister had been concerned to dissociate the Queen's Government from the Jameson Raid. That crisis being

[1] Chamberlain to Salisbury, January 6, 1896.

[2] Chamberlain to Goschen First Lord of the Admiralty, January 8, 1896.

over, he had no intention of allowing the filibustering fiasco to prejudice the Uitlanders' case or diminish his sympathy with it. Upon receiving news of the Kaiser's challenge and before it was published in the newspapers, Chamberlain in the small hours of January 4 cabled to the High Commissioner a long dispatch. It foreshadowed the whole future of the South African question. He summarised the wrongs of the Uitlanders—taxation without representation, and as to education, sanitation, and the rest. He stressed his wish to discuss these matters amicably with the Transvaal. But he closed with earnest words:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR HERCULES ROBINSON

January 4, 1896.— . . . I am aware that victory of the Transvaal Government over Administrator of Mashonaland may possibly find them not willing to make any concessions. If this is the attitude they adopt, they will, in my opinion, make a great mistake; for danger from which they have just escaped was real, and one which, if the causes which led up to it are not removed, may recur, although in a different form. I have done everything in my power to undo and to minimise the evil caused by late unwarrantable raid by British subjects into the Territory of the South African Republic, and it is not likely that such action will be ever repeated; but the state of things of which complaint has been made cannot continue for ever. . . .[1]

These sentences merit thought. From their tenor he never swerved. On these lines, the struggle was to move for nearly four years to a desperate sequel. He is so far from foreseeing it that after the collapse of the Raid his mind is buoyant with hopes of a settlement both speedy and reasonable.

VII

We must turn to Pretoria and Johannesburg. While the world was ringing with the Kruger telegram, Sir Hercules Robinson reached the pleasant little Transvaal capital. In his seventy-second year and in indifferent health, the High Commissioner was as wax in the President's squeezing hands. Kruger had a

[1] "Correspondence on Recent Disturbances . . .", C.7933, No. 49, January 4, 1896, p. 19.

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pale but very large and massive face, with shrouding eyelids. Throughout these next crucial days, he showed the solidity and astuteness of a Bismarck.

Chamberlain expected the Queen's representative to appear at Pretoria as a friendly but firm mediator. Instead, the latter persisted in regarding himself as an apologetic guest. The consequences were ignominious, and in the long run lamentable.

Neither he nor Chamberlain as yet understood Kruger's programme. On the very day of the High Commissioner's arrival Herff, the German Consul, revealed that programme to Berlin: ". . . The Transvaal Government is firmly resolved to utilise the situation in order to demand and if necessary to enforce the unconditional suppression of the Johannesburger agitators: and also to secure the abrogation of the London Convention, broken by England, as well as the dismissal and punishment of the Prime Minister Cecil Rhodes. A further idea is to bring about the dissolution of the Chartered Company and thus break finally the power of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa. . . ."[1]

Consummate was Kruger's method of approaching the first and urgent object, the subjugation of Johannesburg. The President gravely assured Sir Hercules, who believed it, that his young bloods were already almost beyond his control. There were rumours that Jameson and other prisoners might be shot despite the promise of their lives when they surrendered.

Next Sir Hercules held his formal meeting with Kruger, and to Chamberlain summarised its rigorous purport. Johannesburg unconditionally must lay down its arms precedent to any discussion of grievances. Kruger went so far as to put it "that as his Burghers to number of 8000 had been collected and could not be asked to remain indefinitely, he must request a reply, yes or no, to this ultimatum (to Johannesburg) within twenty-four hours".[2] Without further parley the Queen's representative submitted. "The Burgher levies are in such an excited state over the invasion of their country that I believe President of South African Republic could not control them except in the event of

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. p. 35. This was too much for the German Government, whose reply was an urgent warning against going too far; but the evidence is none the less sound regarding Kruger's own views.

[2] "Correspondence on Recent Disturbances . . .", C.7933, No. 89, January 6, 1896, p. 33.

unconditional surrender. I have privately recommended them [the Johannesburgers] to accept ultimatum."[1]

Containing his bitter chagrin, the Secretary of State gave a stern acquiescence, but in terms that even now might have encouraged any High Commissioner of another fibre to insist on concessions to the Uitlanders.

CHAMBERLAIN TO ROBINSON

January 7.—I approve of your advice to Johannesburg. Kruger will be wise not to proceed to extremities at Johannesburg or elsewhere; otherwise the evil animosities already aroused may be dangerously excited. Feeling here still very strong against attitude of Germans and increased by Leyds concluded arrangements for planting 5000 German military settlers in Transvaal. Am considering in concert with colleagues propriety of immediately sending large forces including cavalry and artillery to Cape to provide for all eventualities. A powerful man-of-war is going to Delagoa Bay. The flag-ship and another are returning to Cape from Ashanti Coast.[2]

And on the same date he wrote to his wife:

I have had an anxious day. I feared Kruger was going to be unreasonable and I thought it necessary to arrange, with Lord Salisbury's approval, for a large force to be got ready to go to the Cape. No one can say what might be the consequence if Kruger abused his victory.

VIII

None the less in Pretoria his only diplomatic medium, the High Commissioner, proved a brittle instrument, and broke in his hands. Sir Hercules either said "No" to every energetic instruction, or ignored it. Johannesburg surrendered at discretion, and promised to give up its arms—much fewer than the Boers expected. They imagined 20,000 rifles. Suspecting concealment, they renewed their threats, but had to accept the fact that the luckless Uitlanders never possessed 20,000 rifles—nor a tenth of that number.[3]

Even yet Chamberlain had not the means of realising that the

[1] "Correspondence on Recent Disturbances . . .", C.7933, No. 89, January 6, 1896, p. 33.

[2] *Ibid.* No. 91, p. 33. The latter part of this telegram is not printed in the blue-book.

[3] Robinson to Chamberlain, January 9, 1896, C.7933, No. 110, p. 40.

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High Commissioner was a bruised reed. Pressing for pledges of reasonable reform for the Uitlanders, the Colonial Minister added that Kruger must not rely on foreign interference, which Britain would resist at all costs:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR HERCULES ROBINSON

January 13.—Now that Her Majesty's Government have fulfilled their obligations to the South African Republic, and have engaged to bring the leaders in the recent invasion to trial, they are anxious that the negotiations which are being conducted by you should result in a permanent settlement by which the possibility of further internal troubles will be prevented. . . .

There is a possibility that the President might be induced to rely on the support of some foreign Power in resisting the grant of reforms or in making demands on Her Majesty's Government; and in view of this I think it well to inform you that Great Britain will resist at all costs the interference of any foreign Power in the affairs of the South African Republic. . . .[1]

January 15.—There can be no settlement until the questions raised . . . are disposed of. The people of Johannesburg laid down their arms in the belief that reasonable concessions would be arranged by your intervention; and until these are granted, or are definitely promised to you by the President, the root cause of the recent troubles will remain. . . . It will be your duty to use firm language. . . .[2]

Lethargic and obstinate, Sir Hercules still held that he was helpless and the President immovable. He felt that it was time for him to be gone.[3] At the very moment when Chamberlain believed that the serious negotiations for reform were just beginning, the Queen's representative only wished to escape from them. Chamberlain ordered, "Do not on any account leave Pretoria or make preparations for departure pending further instructions from me which you will receive to-morrow".[4] But when this strict instruction reached the Transvaal, the High Commissioner was already on his way back to Cape Town. Well

[1] Chamberlain to Robinson, January 9, 1896, C.7933, No. 140, pp. 50-51.

[2] *Ibid.* No. 153, p. 55.

[3] In fact Sir Hercules had no sooner been used to obtain the unconditional surrender of Johannesburg than the Transvaal Government wished to get rid of him, as Consul Herff on January 9 telegraphed to Berlin. See *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. p. 49, Herff to the Wilhelmstrasse: "Government hopes that the High Commissioner will depart to-day".

[4] Chamberlain Papers.

might the Colonial Secretary think as he did, that the inefficacy of Sir Hercules Robinson was almost as unfortunate for South Africa as the confusions of the Uitlanders and the crack-brained incursion.

Kruger's programme contained three points—unconditional suppression of the Johannesburg reformers; the final overthrow of Cecil Rhodes and the Chartered Company in South Africa; and total independence of the South African Republic by abolition of the limiting Convention. Of these three points two had not been and could not be won. Chamberlain, backed by the Cabinet and the country, had refused to abrogate the London Convention, and had reasserted the position of Britain as the paramount Power in South Africa. He was resolved not to destroy the Chartered Company as Boers and Germans alike desired, though he meant to disarm it. The Colossus fallen prone was somehow not shattered—so solid as well as imposing was the personality of Rhodes with all these late disfigurements. He had ceased to be Cape Premier. His huge failure was his equal punishment. The Kruger telegram, vindicating his great instinct though not his bad method, revived a full sense of his former achievement.

For the time Kruger's victory over the Uitlanders was absolute. Johannesburg was his captive Babylon, and its medley of mongrels, as he thought them, were under his feet. They had surrendered, as the High Commissioner reported, "placing themselves and their interests unreservedly in my hands in the fullest confidence that I will see justice done to them".[1] He made no attempt in that sense. The Queen's representative had been requested at Pretoria not even to visit Johannesburg. He complied. The Uitlanders now felt that they had been betrayed by the Imperial Government. For some years their feeling was more bitter against the Colonial Minister than against the old High Commissioner. They did not know.

IX

At home the Colonial Minister in a few days had ascended. The crisis which at first threatened his political life had enhanced

[1] C.7933, No. 98, January 7, 1896, p. 35.

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it. Some who thought him diminished when he accepted a department then counted second-rate now said that he had been guided by an almost uncanny instinct for seizing on the means to secure prominence and power. Ernest Judet, then amongst the foremost of French publicists, dwelt on what he called this sudden ascent. Monsieur Chamberlain in the "supreme position" he now occupied would be the British statesman with whom henceforward other countries would have most to reckon. "Let us remember well M. Chamberlain's past and the formidable concentration of his character."[1] With comment, good and bad, the world's press was full of his name.

When he broke silence on the platform after these weeks of storm and stress, his praise at home was more generally than ever before in men's mouths, though some Opposition newspapers began to feel that there was too much of it. On January 21, presiding over an Australian banquet, he said in effect that Britain in her "splendid isolation", as a Canadian statesman had recently called it, was compensated for foreign hostility by the love of her children overseas. "In the time to come, this league of kindred nations, this federation of Greater Britain, will not only provide for its own security but will be a potent factor in maintaining the peace of the world." Amongst other telling sentences—replying to the Kaiser's telegram and to the censure of an Opposition journal—were these:

> A pretty pass we must have come to if the Minister who is responsible for the British Colonies is forbidden to speak of their future, of their greatness, of the importance of maintaining friendly relations with them, of the necessity of promoting the unity of the British race, for fear of giving offence. . . . I do not so understand the position which I hold. I decline to speak with bated breath of our Colonies for fear of giving offence to foreign nations. We mean them no harm; we hope they mean us none.[2]

This was the accent desired by the mother country and the young nations. While Canada had found the word of the moment, "splendid isolation", Australia in these rousing days had declared itself ready to stand with the mother country shoulder

[1] *Le Petit Journal*, January 19, 1896.

[2] London, Hôtel Métropole, January 21, 1896. Banquet given by Queenslanders to the Governor of that colony, Lord Lamington.

to shoulder. Nothing had been known before like this determined sea-wide sympathy; and this Colonial Secretary who had the good luck to experience it was not the man to regard it without responsive pride. True that with one of his mocking hits, but we must remember that he was speaking at a Queensland banquet, he remarked that "Queensland has an area which—shall I say?—is three times greater than the German Empire".[1] Germany despite its smaller acreage by comparison with Queensland contained a thousand times the power, but this defiant flaunt was none the less popular.

His position at this time appears best in his wife's letters to America and in other family records. "You never saw anything like the boxes; the moment he gets home from the office they begin to arrive, and a constant stream follows him."[2] At the theatre he bends forward to look at the audience. He is recognised by someone in the gallery, who calls, "Three cheers for Chamberlain". The audience jumped to its feet and went on cheering.[3] At the other side of the globe the Melbourne Stock Exchange cheered him and sang "Rule, Britannia." At his meetings just mentioned, the audience were "cheering nearly the whole time". He never cared much for this part of life. It was too familiar. But he was refreshed to the heart by the cessation of abuse and by the approval and respect of men and newspapers of both parties. Opposition statesmen like Harcourt and Fowler sent him their warm congratulations. By now, while the confidence of *The Times* in him was restored, a Liberal newspaper remarked that he bade fair to become the idol of the nation. As usual, he looked with ironic humour on his own apotheosis.

X

What were to be his future relations with Rhodes and the Chartered Company? Presently that question threatened a sinister turn.

At the beginning of February, Rhodes arrived in London in

[1] *Colonial Office List*, 1896, p. 201: "The whole of the Colony of Queensland comprises 668,497 square miles or 427,838,080 acres, being equal to three times the German Empire and Belgium together". But the population was not much over 400,000 by comparison with nearly sixty millions in Germany.

[2] Mrs. Chamberlain's letters to America, January 15, 1896.

[3] *Ibid.* January 21, 1896.

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no easy mood, and stayed a very few days. He wished above all things to suppress the enquiry on which the Colonial Secretary was bent.[1] The Charter was as dear to him as his life, and a muddy torrent of exposures might sweep it away. Through the Chartered Company in London, he had bombarded the Colonial Office with telegrams, insisting almost in the tone of a superior giving orders that Chamberlain must force reforms at Johannesburg and could get anything he liked in South Africa if he would only pluck up courage enough to take Kruger by the scruff of the neck.

At the Colonial Office on February 6, the two men met face to face again after years. They got on better than they expected, without altering their reserved minds. One of the Minister's secretaries noted irreverently that when Rhodes arrived he "looked flustered and worried, his face red and his hair rather tumbled. One instinctively thought of certain visits in one's schooldays to the Headmaster—and there is something schoolboyish about C. J. R. which bears out the comparison." The account of the interview, Lord Selborne being present, goes on:

> They were closeted together for an hour and forty-five minutes and went over the ground very thoroughly. We looked in whenever we got a chance, and on the two or three occasions on which I took in papers, etc., the discussion seemed to be proceeding amicably enough. Lord Selborne told me afterwards that it had been most satisfactory, and that Rhodes had shown a great amount of common sense.[2]

Rhodes went straight back to his work in his name-land. He was satisfied in one sense; by no means in another. Though military administration must be withdrawn from the Company, the Charter so far as depended upon the Colonial Secretary would be saved. But enquiry must be held. Clive and Hastings had not escaped it more than a hundred years before. Neither might Rhodes now—but he still meant to crush it if he could, and had already taken a curious course.

[1] Because he knew it under parliamentary conditions to be unavoidable though already foreseeing much of the mischief it would do. "*February* 2, 1896.—*Chamberlain to Balfour.*— . . . I expect no good from an enquiry—only raking up the mud—but can we resist it without raising a suspicion that there is something behind?" They decided that they could not.

[2] Diary (Thursday, February 6, 1896) of Sir Harry Wilson, who was Chamberlain's principal private secretary at that time.

XI

CHAP. LI. ÆT. 59.

Parliament met on February 11, 1896, after this apocalyptic recess. Chamberlain was hailed at Palace Yard by as large a crowd as perhaps ever had assembled there. Within the House of Commons, cheers rolled along the benches on both sides. South Africa overshadowed all other thoughts and topics. Above all, Chamberlain's explanation or defence was expected with an interest seldom known. A sharp chronicler remarked:

> There are nineteen members of the Cabinet. Public attention within the House and outside is concentrated upon one. Liberal, Conservative, Home Rule, Coercionist, Churchman, Dissenter, whatever we be, we are each all one in our admiration of the policy and conduct of Mr. Chamberlain since trouble began in the Transvaal. It is this unanimity of applause that makes the case unique. When Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury came home from Berlin bringing Peace with Honour, town and country rang with acclamation. But the applause was after all the clamour of a political party. It is Mr. Chamberlain's rare privilege to find himself extolled not only by his party but by his political opponents.[1]

Some preliminaries in the tense debate on February 13 are well worth notice. From the outset the demand for enquiry was irresistible. Mr. Sydney Buxton had well represented the Colonial Office in the late House of Commons. He now declared for the Liberal Party that one promising result was gained. "We had now laid it down distinctly for all time that, as regarded those foreign relations [of the Transvaal], Great Britain intended to remain the paramount Power having full control over such relations."[2] Leonard Courtney was the austere censor in the Commons, but he now said of the Colonial Minister, "He has saved us from a great peril . . . he has saved our character and he has saved our honour. He saw at once what was to be done and he did not hesitate to do it. . . . I do not know anyone who could have acted better . . . and I should find it extremely difficult to place a finger on one who would act so well."[3]

[1] Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, 1895–1900, p. 22.

[2] House of Commons, February 13, 1896. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxxvii. col. 300.

[3] *Ibid.* col. 304.

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Chamberlain's own speech was acknowledged without dissent to be a debating triumph as complete as even he ever achieved. It is one of those speeches which are vital to his biography. Before he had gone far, even the customary jeers of the Irish benches died away. The House listened breathless as this perspicuous, close-knit exposition ordered the argument and enforced conviction. Remembering the mixed and vexed circumstances; the suspicions then rife; the contrast between Rhodes's culpable plight and his long record of great working and dreaming for South Africa as well as for himself; the gravity of the latent issues foreign and Imperial—we may doubt whether a more masterly example of efficiency without rhetoric ever was heard in the House of Commons. It does not waste a word; yet not showing the intent elimination, it seems as easy as incisive. As we follow it again we are well repaid though nearly forty years have passed.

He began with the notorious contingency, when he took office, of an Uitlander rising in the Transvaal. The rumours were common talk. The man in the street knew of them. Could the staff of the Colonial Office know less than the man in the street?

> Under the late Liberal Government an outbreak was expected at Johannesburg. What happened? The British Bechuanaland police were collected and concentrated at Mafeking and other forces were under orders to move. Was that wrong? Of course it was done by the High Commissioner, but was it wrong? In my opinion it was absolutely right. . . . When your neighbour's house is on fire, you are quite right to get out your apparatus in order to extinguish it, and nobody can accuse you unless they can prove that you are bringing it out, not with the object of preventing damage . . . but with the deliberate intention of promoting the mischief that you profess a desire to prevent.

And again:

> I say to the best of my knowledge and belief that everybody, that Mr. Rhodes, that the Chartered Company, that the Reform Committee of Johannesburg, and the High Commissioner were all equally ignorant of the intention or action of Dr. Jameson.

Enquiry would be drastic.

The Company would be disarmed but the Charter continued.

I say that in the interest of this country, in the interest of the development of these new estates . . . it would be fatal if they were handed over to the control even of the department which I have the honour to represent. . . . I am perfectly sure that if the persons responsible for the development of these territories had to go, as I have had to go, over and over again, to the Treasury to ask their assent to an expenditure of £5 (*laughter*) it would have been perfectly impossible for them, or for anybody in my position . . . to make railways, to make hundreds of miles of roads, to do everything to bring into rapid occupation the territories which have been submitted to their rule. . . .

A few weeks ago Mr. Rhodes was I think the most powerful man in South Africa. . . . He goes back almost as a private individual, having not the control of a single policeman, having ceased to be Prime Minister, and for the moment at all events, having seen his work jeopardised, possibly destroyed—the work he set himself of consolidating and bringing together the Dutch and English races.

He went on to say a generous and prophetic word of Rhodes:

I am not going to pronounce upon Mr. Rhodes, but I say it would be an act of ingratitude if we were, even now, when suspicion hangs over him, to forget the great services he has rendered. (*Cheers.*) I believe he is capable of great service still . . . even if he has done wrong in the past, he may do a great deal to repair that wrong, and recover the confidence and gratitude of his fellow citizens.

Passing to Johannesburg and reform, Chamberlain left no doubt about the sincerity of his invitation to the Boer patriarch to visit this country:

My conscience is clear. I have approached President Kruger in this matter as a friend to him and his Republic. . . . I will continue on behalf of Her Majesty's Government to endeavour by every legitimate means to secure that justice [to the Uitlanders] which up to the present time has been denied. . . . I do not hesitate to say, it takes no prophet to predict, that sooner or later justice will be done.[1]

It was a momentous pledge.

Until near the end of the speech applause was louder on the Liberal side. Then enthusiasm surged upon the Conservative

[1] February 13, 1896. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxxvii. cols. 308-332.

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benches. An ardent Liberal described the final effect as electric. In the lobby Mr. Tim Healy, of all men little given to compliment in this quarter, stopped Mr. Austen Chamberlain to express admiration for his father's speech and to call it one of the ablest ever heard in the House. Another auditor of this consummate effort said it was nothing like oratory, it was almost more than usually business-like; yet when he sat down you could not perceive a chink in his armour. Eminently was he the man of this session as he was to remain the man of this House of Commons and the next.

XII

These parliamentary appearances of safety were premature. It seemed Chamberlain's ceaseless fate or fortune to have to live dangerously whether he would or no. Very soon his political life was imperilled again when in a renewed attempt to prevent enquiry the Rhodes group devised another plan. Behind the scenes there was an ugly but determined attempt to intimidate Chamberlain by holding over his head documents unknown to him but alleged to be ruinous.

Jameson and his officers arrived in London at the end of February. To Bow Street they were taken amidst scenes of wild enthusiasm such as had been feared. The regular troops from Ashanti received no such reception. The trial did not take place till July, when the crushing indictment was delivered not by counsel but by the Judge, Lord Russell of Killowen. A verdict of "Guilty" was followed by suitable sentences of imprisonment. During the Trial-at-Bar whispers on behalf of Jameson and Society's officers were rife at the Colonial Secretary's expense.

The idea of daunting Chamberlain by dark hints of Imperial connivance raised fungoid growths in the shade.

Rhodes immediately on arriving in England for the brief visit already described had taken dubious action. Before his interview with Chamberlain he arranged that his solicitor should call at the Colonial Office and give warning there of the existence of compromising documents but without producing them.[1] They were to be held, as we said, over Chamberlain's head. The

[1] Select Committee Report, Bourchier Hawksley, examined. H.C.311, pp. 460 *seq.*

solicitor, Bourchier Hawksley, saw Fairfield, his "very great personal friend". The latter at once consulted the permanent Under Secretary and then both spoke to their Chief. He requested copies of the documents:

FAIRFIELD TO HAWKSLEY

February 4, 1896.—I told Meade of our conversation and he said we must at once tell Mr. Chamberlain. We did so, and he requests that you will ask your various clients who have sent telegrams about him or the Office, to send copies to me through you. He does not recollect saying anything anent the insurrection which was supposed to be impending which he would greatly care about if it became public, but he would like to know as a preliminary matter, what it is he and we are supposed to have said. Perhaps also, you could tell us how much of what was sent from here reached the five, or whatever number it was, and, if so, whether it was in substance or in words. *P.S.*—Perhaps you will come and see me with the copies.[1]

The invitation was evaded. More useful to reserve a doubtful weapon. Hawksley answered brazenly: ". . . Mr. C. knows what I know, and can shape his course with this knowledge". But added: "As I hope I made clear to you there is not the slightest intention to make any use whatever of confidential communications".[2]

Then took place at the Colonial Office the interview with Rhodes, who made no mention of a mystery—"he never alluded to the matter; neither did I".[3]

For some months Chamberlain thought no more of it, assuming that there had been a bluffing threat by people who then flinched. But while the Jameson trial was pending, he became aware that serious mischief was afoot. To counsel for the defence the Harris dossier was communicated.[4] In pro-Rhodes circles ran the confidential rumour that Chamberlain had been "in it up to his neck". Towards the end of May the atmosphere of insinuation became too thick to be ignored. The documents in the hands of Rhodes's solicitor were said to contain "something very important indeed".

[1] Select Committee Report, 311, p. 462.

[2] *Ibid.* Hawksley to Fairfield, February 5.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 500. Chamberlain's statement.

[4] Sir Edward Clarke, K.C., *The Story of My Life.*

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"I then determined that I would see exactly what was in them, and accordingly I instructed Mr. Fairfield to insist upon their production."[1] On June 6 they were sent to him, 51 in number, "for confidential perusal and return".

XIII

Of these communications nearly all are familiar. Produced before the South African Committee, they were published in blue-books, and have been sufficiently quoted and elucidated in preceding chapters of this book. The "missing telegrams", those withheld at the enquiry, were only seven in number. But from that time to this they have created a cloud of ambiguity like the sky-long vapours issuing from the copper bottle unsealed by the fisherman in the *Arabian Nights*. The united ability of the Colonial Office was brought to bear on the dossier. With regard to the few messages which hostile minds might use to support a charge of complicity, the following notes and quotations were made:

CHAMBERLAIN AND THE "MISSING TELEGRAMS"

(1) *August* 2, 1895.—Gives a substantially accurate account of the attempt of the Directors to obtain an immediate transfer of the administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and of my decisive refusal. But after recounting this the telegram continues:

"We decided therefore to inform Secretary of State for Colonies guardedly reason why we wish to have base at Gaberones and advisable our presence in Protectorate. Secretary of State for Colonies heartily in sympathy with C. J. Rhodes's policy. . . ."[2]

(2) *August* 13.—"Chamberlain will do anything to assist except hand over the administration protectorate provided he officially does not know of your plan. He does consider Rhodes's ingenuity resource can overcome any difficulty caused by refusal protectorate now. He will carry out promises made with reference to protectorate by previous Governments but mentioned one year as about time in which question will be settled as you wish."

[1] Select Committee Report, 311, p. 500. Chamberlain's statement.

[2] The rest of this telegram is code-jargon about matters in no way concerning the point here at issue.

(3) *August* 21.—"You are aware Chamberlain states Dr. Jameson's plan must not be mentioned to him."

(4 and 5) *October* 28 *and* 29.—In the first the sender at Cape Town suggests that Lord Grey should see me [Chamberlain] privately to show the great importance of an immediate transfer of the Protectorate, and in reply from London it is stated, "We dare not mention the reason" which proves that up to that time at any rate, I had not been put in possession of the true reason.

(6) *November* 5.—Contains the statement, "We have stated positive that results Dr. Jameson's plan include British flag. Is this correct?"

(7) *November* 7.—"Secretary of Colonies says you must allow decent interval and delay fireworks for fortnight."[1]

Here the historic secret, as it has been considered, is out at last.[2] It proves to be the key of Mother Hubbard's cupboard, or of Madame Humbert's safe.

Take the telegrams in order.

First Telegram.—This is only our old friend the "guarded allusion" to the desirability of a force on the western border of the Transvaal in view of the expected revolt on the Rand. Intervention in that case was the High Commissioner's policy also, and had been emphatically that of his predecessor, Lord Loch, under the Liberal Government.

Second and Third Telegrams.—The mischievous words are that Chamberlain must not officially "know of your plan"; and "Dr. Jameson's plans must not be mentioned to him". But no human being then conceived that Dr. Jameson's plans might some day include a lawless foray into the Transvaal in a manner not only uninvited by the Johannesburg reformers but prohibited even by them.

Fourth and Fifth Telegrams.—The senders show, as so many of these pages have shown, that Chamberlain is far from having any intimate understanding with Rhodes. "We dare not mention the reason." While to the Cape Premier delay is agony, the Colonial Secretary for three months has suspended his decision

[1] Rhodes replied on November 12, 1895: "29 Nov. will be in time".

[2] Some years later documents stolen from Mr. Hawksley's office were published in the *Indépendance Belge*. They had been supposed to contain the "missing telegrams", but are wholly irrelevant to that question.

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so as to secure a just settlement for the Bechuana chiefs and tribes.

Sixth Telegram.—Under which flag? This is important in itself and in its effects, but it is not compromising. All these people are speaking of an imminent revolution in Johannesburg, and other information at the Colonial Office is the same. The Secretary of State is very far from being enamoured of a Republic manipulated by cosmopolitan capitalists under the Vierkleur. Is Rhodes working for the British flag or not? Fairfield for the Colonial Minister puts the question and it brings a plain answer.

The Seventh and last of the "Missing Telegrams", November 7: "Secretary of Colonies says you must allow decent interval and delay fireworks for fortnight".—This is the worst. It is sent just after the "great indaba" at the Colonial Office when Chamberlain imposed the settlement between the Company and the chiefs, to Rhodes's wrath. The "fortnight", at this moment, can have no conceivable reference to a Raid not yet imagined by its author. Chamberlain when first examining the Hawksley dossier was reminded by his private secretary,[1] who was standing by his side at the time, that he had, in fact, jested about "fireworks". As the Charter directors were taking their leave he said laughingly to Lord Grey that after being bombarded with excited telegrams in Rhodes's interest he hoped to have a fortnight's respite from those "fireworks".[2] There was no secrecy. There were a dozen persons present. The Chartered directors taking their leave were the Duke of Fife, Earl Grey, Mr. Rochfort Maguire and Dr. Rutherfoord Harris. Chamberlain could not conceive that an open jest would be made the subject of a calculated message sent behind his back.

[1] Now Sir Harry Wilson.

[2] Chamberlain Papers. His note made in June 1896. Remark that two days before, Harris had sent Rhodes a very excited telegram (November 4): "Have telegraphed Earl Grey must come London. You have not chosen best man to arrange with J. Chamberlain. I have already sent Flora to convince J. Chamberlain support *Times* newspaper and if you can telegraph course you wish *Times* to adopt now with regard to Transvaal Flora will act" (Select Committee Report, Appendix, 311–I, p. 594). This was obsequious fudge from the factotum whose desire to flatter the desires of his master must always be recollected. *The Times* was not influenced by him nor Chamberlain through him. Miss Shaw said in evidence, "I should not have accepted any mission from Dr. Harris to go to Mr. Chamberlain; he was not in a position to send me anywhere" (Select Committee Report, 311, p. 466).

Yet had this seventh of the "missing telegrams" been published at any time during the ten years after the Raid it would have caused all the world abroad and nearly half the nation at home to think—though nothing could be more remote from the truth—that the Colonial Secretary had been an accomplice in the Raid. He never dreamed of that possibility, though he and his department expected a Johannesburg rising within a few weeks and assumed Rhodes to possess full knowledge and large influence.

XIV

How can we escape the feeling that amongst all the "Harris telegrams", published and suppressed, some were framed with a deliberate view to covering Rhodes by implicating Chamberlain?

What were his alternatives in this odious dilemma? In no case could he yield to veiled threats, however sinister. What then? Either he could resign office to fight with a vengeance, and then he would have destroyed the Chartered Company, despite his strong wish to continue it as a disarmed administration. Or with the support of the whole Cabinet he could leave the owners of the dossier to make what use they liked of it—taking their own course at their own risk. If they then tried to play their own game against the Government, that too would mean the end of the Chartered Company.

First, he felt it his duty to tender his resignation to the Prime Minister. Lord Salisbury did not dream of entertaining that offer. The Government was prepared to stand or fall with the Colonial Minister.

Thereupon, in the middle of June 1896, the dossier, after the department had taken full note of its contents, was returned to the Chartered Company's solicitor with these words: ". . . Mr. Chamberlain feels the greatest surprise that such telegrams should ever have been sent—or that, if sent, they should not have been submitted to him for confirmation or correction. . . . If they should be made public—to which Mr. Chamberlain makes no personal objection whatever—he will be prepared to deal with them in full detail and as they deserve."[1] By this time the Colonial Secretary, thoroughly awakened, asked himself whether

[1] Fairfield to Hawksley, June 17, 1896.

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there was not an attempt to "blackmail" him, and through him Her Majesty's Government, with a view to smother the Parliamentary Enquiry which Rhodes and his retinue were still denouncing and resisting with all their might.

The Jameson Trial was no sooner concluded than Chamberlain moved (July 30) for a Select Committee of the House of Commons, the terms of reference to be as wide as possible. At this Hawksley returned to the charge. He asserted "that responsibilities were undertaken in the honest belief that they were undertaken with the approval of the Imperial Authorities. . . . I very respectfully submit that on reconsideration Mr. Chamberlain will recognise that reasons other than the ostensible ones were intimated to him why the acquisition by the Chartered Company of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was urgently necessary."[1]

Chamberlain's colloquial opinion of "these people" generally, was that "bigger blunderers never existed". With the same contempt he regarded the fuss in society to secure privileged treatment for Jameson's officers and especially denounced one of them. "He says it was not his fault—he was only obeying orders! He lies—and the only orders he received were to come back, which he disregarded. Such is a Stock Exchange hero!"[2]

When Hawksley allows himself to talk of "honest belief" in Colonial Office complicity, Chamberlain no longer doubts that there has been all through a deliberate plot to entrap him; and he breaks out about "blackguards" and "blackmail".

CHAMBERLAIN TO FAIRFIELD

August 22.—The letter from Hawksley is characteristic. It is impossible now to resist the conclusion from this and other communications from the same source that there was a deliberate plot to commit the Colonial Office involuntarily and by partial confidence to a general approval of Rhodes's plans, and then to use this afterwards as a screen for the whole conspiracy. What is there in South Africa I wonder that makes blackguards of all who get involved in its politics? I should like to tell Hawksley what I think of him and his fellow conspirators and defy him to do his worst. I would do so if I stood alone, but I am afraid

[1] Hawksley to Fairfield, August 20, 1896.

[2] Chamberlain to the Duke of Devonshire, December 22, 1896.

that charges of the kind indicated in his letter although they might be discredited and laughed at in this country, would do much harm in South Africa and on the Continent. . . .[1]

And he added next day, "It is time to have done with him and this blackmailing scheme". Some weeks later he minuted, "They are a dishonourable lot from top to bottom, and we shall have to fight them to the death. Meanwhile my case is that while I knew all about the revolution I knew nothing of anything so mad as Jameson's raid."[2]

For months the ugly wrangle continued. Hawksley—"rather foxy", said Sir Robert Meade—would not publish but declined to retract. Even Chamberlain's friend Lord Grey, now administrator of Rhodesia, wrote from Buluwayo protesting that the nomination of Labouchere to serve on the Committee of Enquiry was an intolerable insult to Rhodes and he might not submit to it. "Rhodes thinks his own dignity and self-respect will not allow him to appear before a Committee of Enquiry of which Labby is a member . . . he is being tried a bit too far. He knows that the publication of these miserable cables would do him good, not harm."[3]

Clearly, the Colossus was a child in his notions of British parliamentary conditions and necessities. Chamberlain replied that enemies of the Company as well as friends were on the Committee in accordance with common usage and propriety, and continued earnestly:

CHAMBERLAIN TO EARL GREY

Colonial Office, October 13, 1896.— . . . You, at least, are in a position to confirm me when I say I did not know and could not have known of any plan or intention of Mr. Rhodes which could possibly lead to such an invasion of the Transvaal in time of peace as was perpetrated by Dr. Jameson. . . . My first inclination was to insist on the immediate publication of these telegrams, together with my comments, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that although I might be able completely to satisfy the House of Commons and English public opinion,

[1] Of all this Harcourt wrote afterwards (June 15, 1897) to Chamberlain: "to me the blackmailing part of the transaction is the basest and blackest of the whole".

[2] Chamberlain to Sir Robert Meade, October 24, 1896.

[3] Earl Grey to Chamberlain, August 20, 1896.

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yet that the disclosure would be used by the enemies of England, both on the Continent and in the Transvaal, and would seriously embarrass future action. . . . Personally I do not shrink from the fullest publication of anything that has taken place, although I believe that the disclosure of the telegrams to which you refer would be the death-blow of the Company.

Rhodes saw presently that he had taken a false line which, if further pursued, could only lead to the Empire's detriment and his own. Futile tactics against the Colonial Office were at last abandoned. Some of his journalistic friends carried on a vendetta against Chamberlain personally, but Hawksley's hints of pressure were not renewed. At last Lord Grey from Umtali towards the end of the year (December 10) wrote:

My own strong view, and Rhodes agrees with me, is that your judgment as to what ought to be done, in the present situation is much more likely to be correct than anyone else's, and I think you will find on his arrival in England that he will wish to follow any advice which you may think it right to offer.

XV

The Select Committee to enquire into the Raid could not get to work until next session. There were odd interludes. When Rhodes arrived again in London, one of his best adherents, Edmund Garrett of the *Cape Times*, made a preliminary call on Chamberlain and urged that the Committee could do nothing but harm and should be shelved. The Colonial Secretary replied that it must be faced. His final remark to Garrett was a flash of character in very unconventional language: "I don't care a twopenny damn for the whole lot of them; but if they put me with my back to the wall, they'll see some splinters".[1]

Rhodes himself, with a singular kink of mind, still believed for twenty-four hours more—but no longer—that to suppress the loathed enquiry or cause it somehow to "fizzle out" was still a possibility under British parliamentary conditions. He meant to make a final effort in that sense. Amidst the Matabele rebellion, another dark consequence of the Raid, this strange

[1] January 25, 1897, Diary of Sir Harry Wilson, then Chamberlain's principal private secretary.

man's height of courage and his pacifying statesmanship had done much to redeem his name. He had received triumphal honours in South Africa on his way home to face his parliamentary judges. At Port Elizabeth he spoke of the "unctuous rectitude" of insular opinion.[1]

Once more he met the Colonial Secretary at the Colonial Office towards the end of January 1897. Lord Selborne, who made a third at the meeting, wrote immediately afterwards an invaluable account.[2] From it what follows is taken.

Rhodes opened with his usual grandeur or grandiosity of self-assurance. He was good enough to agree that the only possible policy had been followed since "Mr. Chamberlain had been given away by Lord Rosmead at Pretoria". But then the colloquy came to close quarters.

MR. RHODES: . . . Was it inevitable that the Select Committee of the House of Commons should reopen a healing sore and do incalculable mischief? If he were Mr. Chamberlain he would use his majority in the House to refuse the reappointment of the Committee; at any rate, need the Government whips force their men to vote for the Committee when they want to vote against it? The best thing by far was "no Committee", the ground alleged being the completeness and exhaustiveness of the Cape enquiry; the next best thing would be that the cables should not be made public; he and his friends would go to the Clock Tower sooner than produce them; . . . he harped again and again and again on the evil which the publication of the cables would do to England in her relations with foreign countries for years to come, and in South Africa; he urged that any personal sacrifice was preferable to this.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN expressed his opinions very freely on the proceedings of Mr. Hawksley and the attempts to blackmail himself; he pointed out that the abandonment of the Committee was now impossible and that it was Mr. Hawksley and Mr. Stead who had made it impossible by the mystery they had raised about the cables and the complicity of the C.O. and by their unceasing gossip; that he quite admitted that there were reasons of public consideration which made the publication of the telegrams most inexpedient . . . ; that for himself he had no fear; he had been greatly annoyed at the way he had been treated, he imputed no

[1] Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes*, pp. 278-279.

[2] Entitled "Notes of an Interview between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Rhodes at which I only was present, to-day at C.O.", January 26, 1897.

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motives, but the senders of the cables, whoever they were he did not know, had contrived wholly to misrepresent his position; that he was quite ready to face an enquiry and let the Committee judge him. . . .

MR. RHODES reiterated his opinion that the Committee might yet be stopped . . . he did not palliate Mr. Hawksley's action but said that Mr. Chamberlain must not believe all he heard; he [Rhodes] did not; he had been told that Mr. Chamberlain had been speaking in terms of the strongest hostility of him, but he did not believe it.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN said it certainly was not true; he had had most objectionable observations attributed to Mr. Rhodes concerning himself . . . that he had not given credence to these reports but had been glad to receive Mr. Rhodes's explicit denial of them; that so far as he knew Mr. Rhodes's general objects were the same as his and there should be be no difficulty in their working together; they were both big Englanders; this applied only to the general objects, not to the means of achieving these objects, as to which he had differed before and might differ again. . . .

MR. RHODES said he wanted again to lay stress on the necessity for personal sacrifices if needs be *pro patria*. What was his reputation or Mr. Chamberlain's compared with the interests of the country? "In twenty years you will be gone, snuffed out, but the country will remain." The moral of this was that the Committee should be stopped even now and let the world say what it liked of Mr. Chamberlain or of himself.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN replied that he took no objection to the principle but very much to the particular application, because (1) it was not possible; (2) if possible it would in the end produce more evil to the country than the enquiry would.

MR. RHODES said "Nothing is impossible; everything is impossible until you are confronted with something more impossible still, and you must choose between them". It is better to lose your arm than to lose your life. He did not in the least fear Mr. Chamberlain's enquiries into the administration of the British South Africa Co. They had an excellent record of development to show. What he did fear was Sir W. Harcourt on the scent of the cables; personally he was a charming man, but he had not an ounce of patriotism in him and for a party advantage he would go all lengths.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN reiterated his policy was to keep the Charter as far the best method of developing the country.

MR. RHODES said of course Dr. Leyds wanted a Crown Colony in Rhodesia because the High Commissioner would govern it then, the Cape Ministers would govern the High Commissioner, Mr. Hofmeyr would govern the Cape Ministers, and Dr. Leyds would govern Mr. Hofmeyr.

The enquiry, opened about ten days later (Friday, February 5), dragged its slow length along for five months. The scene was in a commonplace committee-room. There was no resemblance to Westminster Hall and Warren Hastings. Rhodes's stout and sandwiches would have shocked not only Burke but Sheridan. The tribunal of fifteen appointed by the House of Commons sat at a horse-shoe table. Mr W. L. Jackson, afterwards Lord Allerton, was the Chairman. The Colonial Secretary sat on his right and Sir William Harcourt on his left. The witness-chair and the table before it were set in the middle of the horseshoe. The course of the enquiry and its enormous mass of evidence need not much detain us. The heart of the evidence has been examined already in these pages, and we have gained more knowledge of the facts than the voluminous report supplied. As a physical ordeal this business racked the Colonial Secretary, adding many hours a week to his work, amidst the other ceaseless fatigues of the Diamond Jubilee Year. Nothing is so well remembered as the early scene when the Colossus justified his nickname and overshadowed his inquisitors. On the first day Rhodes seemed likely to be a nervous or even a bungling witness. After that he was imperturbably resourceful. Fortified by his sandwiches and stout, he took charge of the Committee, and spoke as if his fifteen judges were in the dock.

Weeks afterwards Chamberlain was the centre of the proceedings, but we have found it necessary to anticipate that scene. The occasion was at the end of April 1897. "Mr. Harris, L.R.C.S.", as the Report calls him, opening his evidence, soon began to refer to his first visit to the Colonial Office and his "guarded allusion to the desirability of there being a police force near the border". He was interrupted by the Colonial Secretary. In view of the state of feeling in South Africa that statesman asked and received the chairman's permission to give at once his own version. Chamberlain left the high table instantly for

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the witness-chair, and amidst breathless interest made the correcting statement with which we are familiar. We may recall that afterwards he was fully corroborated by Lord Selborne.[1]

Rhodes had resolved from the beginning that the "missing telegrams" should not be produced. His solicitor was summoned finally before the Committee at the end of May:

CHAIRMAN: "We therefore call upon you, Mr. Hawksley, to produce the telegrams."

WITNESS: "I can only say, with very great respect . . . I still feel that my duty compels me to act upon the instructions I have received from Mr. Rhodes."[2]

Whether the Committee ought to have compelled the production of these documents will always be a contested question. To leave cause for doubt and suspicion was a serious evil from which Chamberlain has suffered most up to now. To insist would have been futile. The Select Committee could have summoned Rhodes to return to England from Mashonaland. It seems probable that he would not have obeyed. It seems certain that had he returned he would have maintained his refusal, pleading the public interest. Then the parliamentary tribunal might submit helplessly. Or it might urge the House of Commons to send Rhodes to the Clock Tower. Keeping him there without avail would have made him far more popular with the crowd at home and excited the passionate anger of the British in South Africa. In any case, the unfortunate Committee, whether it desisted or insisted, would have covered itself with ludicrous ignominy. Again, they would have had to delay their Report until yet another session. Every element of mischief would have been aggravated in South Africa and amongst foreign nations.

The Committee came to its crucial business of framing a Report. For Labouchere's draft there was but one vote, that of Labouchere. He attributed to Rhodes and his junta the basest stock-jobbing motives. Edward Blake, the former eminent Canadian lawyer who had become an Irish Nationalist member at Westminster, withdrew in protest against the failure to extort the withheld evidence. Apart from these two, the Com-

[1] Select Committee Report, C.311: Harris, pp. 336-337; Chamberlain, pp. 337-339; Selborne, pp. 504-505.

[2] Select Committee Report, C.311, p. 473.

mittee was unanimous. We must remember what was its composition. It included two foremost Liberal leaders, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as well as Sir William Harcourt. The latter played a forcible part with single conviction, but with mixed feelings. Towards Chamberlain he was moved by a chivalrous sympathy. On the other hand he looked on Rhodes as a gross schemer.[1] But Harcourt was guided by what he held to be outweighing reasons of State in deciding not to pursue at any cost the attempt to bring to light the few undisclosed messages.

After sitting for over five months, the Committee on July 13, 1897, completed its Report. In unsparing terms it condemned Rhodes and some others for political misconduct and duplicity, though in effect acquitting them all of merely sordid motives.

The sixth article of the conclusions absolutely exonerated Chamberlain and his department.

> Neither the Secretary of State for the Colonies nor any of the officials of the Colonial Office received any information which made them or should have made them or any of them aware of the plot during its development.[2]

Further in the body of the Report occur these words upon the missing telegrams:

> The fact that Mr. Rhodes (after having authorised that they should be shown to Mr. Chamberlain) has refused to allow them to be produced before the Committee leads to the conclusion that he is aware that any statements purporting to implicate the Colonial Office contained in them were unfounded and the use made of them in support of his action in South Africa was not justified.[3]

Advanced Radicals were of course sworn that the Report signed and defended by their leaders should not pass without challenge. They moved that Hawksley be ordered to attend at the Bar. The debate on July 26 is described not in any sensational journal but in the *Annual Register*—its then editor, Arthur Elliot, was a member of Parliament and presumably an auditor—as "one of the most remarkable debates which had

[1] Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. pp. 431-432.
[2] Select Committee Report, C.311, p. xvi. [3] *Ibid.* p. xv.

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ever taken place within the walls of the House of Commons". Sir William Harcourt declared that whatever Harris might say or insinuate, "I who have seen the witnesses would believe the Colonial Secretary and Lord Selborne". And again:

> Is it possible that any man who had been a party and an accomplice in these transactions could have acted upon the spur of the moment as the Colonial Secretary acted? There is no jury in the country that would believe it possible.[1]

This goes home. Chamberlain's best defence was his own, a feat of frankness and trenchancy. It was twenty minutes to eleven when he rose in a House thronged below and above. It must be remembered that while the Radicals assailed him with virulent insinuation, the majority of the Conservatives considered him not pro-Rhodes enough. A Liberal chronicler described this critical hour and a celebrated achievement:

> It was noteworthy that the Colonial Secretary on rising was not received with anything like enthusiastic cheering from the Ministerialists, a fact that increased the value of the tribute paid to his incisive, forcible, sometimes passionate, always lucid speech in the currency of cheers which reverberated through its delivery, and rose in loud outburst when he resumed his seat.[2]

The following passages from this speech are part of history and keep their living vibration:

> My answer to these anonymous assailants is not in anything I can say. If they do not believe anything that I said before the Committee they will not believe what I say now. My answer is my action.
>
> What happened when the Raid took place—when the suggestion was made to me that the Raid might take place? At that moment I could have no knowledge of what would be the success of the Raid. Many persons about me thought it would be successful, that the revolution in Johannesburg would be successful, and that the assistance that would come to it would add to its success.
>
> I had before me what is now known as the "women and children" letter, which expressed the fear that English women and children were

[1] July 27, 1897. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. li. col. 1127.

[2] *Daily News*, July 27, 1896. Reprinted with slight alterations in *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, 1895–1900, by Henry W. Lucy, pp. 177-178.

in danger in Johannesburg. I had no reason whatever to doubt the authenticity of that letter; and I did not know, and none of my advisers knew, that the thing contemplated in that letter might not take place. I had the advice of many persons interested in South Africa who called on me to hold my hand, and I had every excuse for holding my hand.

I was alone in London; I had no communication with my colleagues; I had to act at a moment's notice; and I did act in spite of all the temptations to refrain, in spite of the doubts in my own mind, because I felt that the act of Dr. Jameson was wrong, and therefore I felt, as a minister of the Crown, that I was bound to repudiate it.

Is that consistent with these scandalous accusations? It is impossible to suppose if you think me such a fool, that any English minister could be such a knave as to do what is attributed to me—that I could have taken this step by myself and in the circumstances described to the House, if I had known about it, was myself a party to the Raid, and approved the policy of which the Raid was a part. That is the state of the case, and I am content to rest it there, and I have always been so content.[1]

So far, with rare fire and emotion as well as with his usual logic and terse clarity, he had gathered sympathies towards himself and swept them along with him.

XVI

But then he did a perilous thing. He not only repelled the Radical demand that the name "Cecil Rhodes" should be erased from the roll of Privy Councillors; he paid his glowing tribute to that statesman despite "one gigantic mistake":

But as to one thing I am perfectly convinced—that while the fault of Mr. Rhodes is about as great as a politician or a statesman can commit there has been nothing proved—and in my opinion there exists nothing —which affects Mr. Rhodes's personal position as a man of honour. . . . I dismiss absolutely these charges [the charges of stock-jobbing schemes and other mercenary motives] which affect his personal honour, and I find myself face to face with a statesman who has done the greatest service to the British Empire, but who has made one gigantic mistake. . . . I take it that the Privy Councillorship was conferred upon Mr. Rhodes

[1] July 27, 1897. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. li. col. 1166.

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for invaluable services which nothing can dim. . . . We have got to govern South Africa, and unless we attempt to find out what South African opinion is and unless we are to a very considerable extent guided by the opinion of South Africa, we may lose South Africa.[1]

At that, the Colonial Secretary read to the House of Commons a long letter from Sir Gordon Sprigg, the Premier of Cape Colony, entreating in the interests of British and Dutch that the past greatness of Rhodes and his future potentialities for good should be remembered and that he should not be trampled or degraded. This worked strongly on the large preponderance of the House. Towards the end Chamberlain declared that though Imperial control must be asserted in several ways, "the Government do not intend to abolish the Charter". On division the Radical motion was rejected by 304 to 77.

This eulogy of Rhodes wakened ringing echoes on the Unionist side. But it was heard with discomfort by many even there, and with dismay by Harcourt and other Liberals hitherto scrupulously considerate towards the Colonial Secretary. For once in his life he had prejudiced himself by a mistake in his manner of approaching an argument. The Committee had found Rhodes guilty of "grave breaches of duty". If there be any personal morality in politics, these were breaches of honour as of duty. Chamberlain ought to have dwelt more on misdoing as well as mistake. Then he could have urged with unanswerable weight, according to the findings of the Committee, that the offence was not rooted in mercenary dishonour; that it sprang from a high dream, not from base avarice; that the services tarnished were too great to be effaced. Since the Raid, Rhodes unarmed had overawed the Matabele rebellion.

Magnified then not only by every open enemy and other detractor but by many honest persons more simply shocked, the flaw in that consummate speech is to-day of small account. Chamberlain's estimate has been vindicated by time. The name of Rhodes is wide on the map; Oxford accepts his stately foundation; no one in South Africa desires to reject his bequests or erase his memorials; his grave in the silence of the Matoppos has a reconciling grandeur. The Dutch recognise his lights and

[1] July 27, 1897. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. li. col. 1172.

the British his shadows. His conspiracy was prompted by the anomalies and omens of the Kruger regime. Though he was not to see Federation in his lifetime, in spirit he was like Cavour, an architect after death.

The Colonial Minister's words might have been spoken avowedly from a classic text—"that Lord Clive has at the same time rendered great and meritorious services to his country". Yet there were some malicious and some credulous persons who whispered that he had pronounced his tribute under duress—in the knowledge that a certain Liberal member, primed by Hawksley, sat in the House of Commons ready to reveal, were Rhodes too much censured, the telegrams refused to the Committee. Observe the peculiarity of this slander. Chamberlain was expressing the mind of the whole Cabinet against the Radical demand that Rhodes's name should be struck out of the roll of the Privy Council. What he said of Rhodes in July 1897 he had said, and with more emphasis in some respects, long before he had been threatened with the Hawksley dossier.[1] When he knew of its existence he at once tendered his resignation to Salisbury. When his resignation was as promptly declined the whole Unionist Government became identified with him. He defied every suggestion of "blackmail". Rhodes himself and those whom we may call the "Chartered libertines" desired above all to intimidate him into suppressing the enquiry. Against all their efforts and resorts—against blasts of poison-gas from one quarter of pro-Rhodes journalism—he ensured the enquiry and never swerved nor blenched. We must repeat his fighting profanity: "I don't care a twopenny damn for the whole lot of them; but if they put me with my back to the wall, they'll see some splinters". He would have crushed the Chartered Company. Above all, he was a dangerous man. They saw it and backed down. Chamberlain knew not all—as he sometimes said—but much about an expected Johannesburg revolution and was prepared to deal with it through the High Commissioner. He had not a shadow of complicity with the Raid.

[1] In the House of Commons, February 13, 1896, and May 8, 1896. See page 133 *infra*.

CHAPTER LII

CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS KRUGER: FIRST PHASE

(1896–1897)

THE South African Deadlock—Chamberlain's Optimism after the Raid—Tragi-comedy of "The Kruger Visit"—Beginning of the War of Dispatches—The Colonial Secretary states the Uitlanders' Case—"Home Rule for the Rand"—Rejected by Both Sides—Kruger's Programme of Complete Independence—Chamberlain insists on the Convention—"To Be or Not To Be?"—The Crisis on the Aliens Laws—Increasing Predominance of Boer Armaments—Chamberlain's Cabinet Memorandum urges a Corresponding Increase of British Military Strength in South Africa—A Modest Reinforcement—Need for a New High Commissioner—Chamberlain thinks of Sir Alfred Milner—Universal Congratulations—Latent Gravity of the Situation and Milner's hastened Departure—Chamberlain's frank Conversations with Dr. Leyds—A Long Pause and Better Hopes.

I

BOOK XI. 1896–97.

THE long sequel of the Raid at home, has carried us to the mid-summer of 1897. We must bring up to the same point the collateral narrative of affairs in South Africa itself. We left off at Pretoria in the week after the Raid, when the old dispirited High Commissioner, having been used to paralyse Johannesburg, evaded Chamberlain's instructions and allowed himself to be bowed out, or politely pushed to the door, without stipulation for reforms.[1]

[1] January 11, 1896. Acting State Secretary, Pretoria, to High Commissioner, Pretoria: ". . . inasmuch as your Excellency . . . is anxious to return to the Colony without delay, and as this Government also at present finds no inducement to request your Excellency to lengthen your stay here, his Honour and the members of the Executive Council wish to take this opportunity to congratulate your Excellency before your departure, in writing, on the manner in which the object of your coming has been fulfilled". The irony of the closing compliment is hard to equal even in the South African blue-books of 1895–1899.—C.8063, 1896, p. 164.

Nonplussed for a moment, when a feeble agent failed him, the Colonial Secretary soon showed his sanguine resiliency. He cherished the pleasing vision of enticing Oom Paul to London and discoursing face to face with that obdurate potentate. Three weeks after Jameson's surrender Chamberlain remarked, "I am hoping to make a great coup and to get Kruger over here . . . if he will walk into my parlour it will be very nice of him".[1] The Prime Minister commented, "It will be a very good thing if you are able to bring Kruger over. He will emulate the fate of Clarence and be drowned in turtle soup."[2]

What had happened to conjure up these remarkable expectations? The initiative came from a Rand magnate, J. B. Robinson, who hated Rhodes and liked Kruger. A prudential member of the weak Cape Cabinet, patched up after Rhodes's fall, was Sir James Sivewright. He went to Pretoria. Therefrom he cabled to the Colonial Secretary that the Boer President was ready to discuss in London all matters of common interest. Chamberlain was as ready to discuss every point but one. There could be no modification of the British right of control over the foreign relations of the Transvaal.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR HERCULES ROBINSON

January 27, 1896.—I have now received a positive assurance that President Kruger will accept an invitation to visit this country. Unless you see strong objections you should, therefore, give him, in the name of Her Majesty's Government, a cordial invitation to come to England for the purpose of discussing all questions relating to the security of the South African Republic and the general welfare of South Africa.

You should, in order to prevent the possibility of any mistake, repeat the statements made in previous telegram, that we cannot consent to modify the terms of Article IV. of the London Convention, but other matters are open to friendly discussion.

It is hoped that the President will come here as the guest of the British Government, who will make suitable arrangements for his entertainment. They will also arrange that one of Her Majesty's vessels shall convey him to England from Delagoa Bay or any other port that he may prefer. . . .[3]

[1] Chamberlain to his wife. Colonial Office, January 23, 1896.

[2] Salisbury to Chamberlain, January 24, 1896.

[3] C.8063, 1896, No. 3, pp. 1 and 2.

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The Colonial Secretary a few days after was "more than ever convinced that a personal interchange of views with the President would result in a settlement satisfactory to all".[1]

Prompt acceptance of the British invitation did not ensue. There is no doubt about the working of Kruger's mind. Full, untrammelled independence was his fixed idea and object. To be free, to be wholly free, to escape from British restriction of his dealings with foreign Powers—this he regarded as the soul of his natural right and as the key of his safety. He had for some time contended that British suzerainty had ceased to exist. But one galling paragraph, Article IV., ruled the Convention still in force. "The South African Republic will conclude no treaty or engagement with any State or nation, other than the Orange Free State . . . until the same has been approved by Her Majesty the Queen." Kruger desired above all things the abolition of this clause and its implications. He remarked that he was ready to go to England but added very quietly: "I trust Her Majesty's Government will show itself disposed to discuss at the same time the point on which they say no modification can be made".[2]

II

Kruger was reinforced by a grievance. Chamberlain had sent out his first long South African dispatch.[3] The vigour of its unconventional directness enabled his critics to call it a specimen of the new diplomacy. The nation liked it the more. He opened with a rapid summary of conditions before Jameson's irruption. The Raid had been repudiated and crushed. But the wrongs of the Uitlanders remained, and would be a cause of disturbance until redressed.

Since the Convention of 1884 Her Majesty's Government have recognised the South African Republic as a free and independent Government as regards all its internal affairs not touched by the Convention; but as regards its external relations it is subject to the control of this country in accordance with the provisions of Article IV. There is no reason to anticipate that any foreign State will dispute our rights, but it is

[1] C.8063, 1896, No. 5, p. 3. [2] February 8, *Ibid.* No. 9, p. 4.
[3] February 4, 1896, C.7933, pp. 83-91.

necessary to state clearly that Her Majesty's Government intend to maintain them in their integrity.

Then he went on to recapitulate all the Uitlanders' complaints —a list "formidable in length and serious in quality".

What was the remedy? How could the Uitlanders be relieved and the burghers secured? The mining community occupied a limited area of the whole country. Might not the solution be found in a scheme of local government for that area, leaving the Boers undisturbed in their paramount control of the State? Chamberlain's dispatch concluded by propounding his plan of "Home Rule for the Rand" as it came to be nicknamed. It called up on every side reminiscences of his administration of Birmingham.

> Basing myself upon the expressed desire of President Kruger to grant municipal government to Johannesburg, I suggest for his consideration, as one way of meeting the difficulty, that the whole of the Rand district from end to end should be erected into something more than a municipality as that word is ordinarily understood; that in fact it should have a modified local autonomy, with powers of legislation on purely local questions, and subject to the veto of the President and Executive Council.[1]

Where no logical solution was then possible as between the Boers and the strangers, this scheme of local government for the Rand deserved more consideration than it then received from anyone. Kruger might well suppose that an autonomous Johannesburg would become Rhodes's citadel.

The Colonial Secretary committed a breach of etiquette distorted by the Opposition but blamed on his own side by more weighty censors than the Turveydrops of diplomatic deportment. Prematurely he published the whole dispatch.[2] It filled columns of the British press before Kruger knew of it. Surrounded by misunderstandings in his own party since the abandonment of the Uitlanders by Sir Hercules, Chamberlain desired to "escape into publicity" just before Parliament met. The gain at home was real. A breach of etiquette neither heinous nor heedless was his first mistake through five such besetting weeks as might tax the wits of any man.

[1] C.7933, p. 90.

[2] *London Gazette*, February 7, 1896.

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Kruger was in dudgeon at what he might well regard as a designed slight on his status. But the premature publication was a bagatelle. The Boer President's rooted objection was to the substance of the dispatch. His Government, he retorted, would not tolerate "any interference and intermingling, however well meant, in internal affairs";[1] and he published in the *Staats Courant* this round reply to the *London Gazette*. But it seemed that the huff might pass and the deadlock loosen.

III

Again, Chamberlain was responsive. Since nobody in South Africa wanted his "Home Rule for the Rand" he would jettison it at once, and await the President's own ideas about a solution of the Uitlander imbroglio.[2] With an impromptu blandishment much parodied at the time he asked, "How is Mrs. Kruger?"

At the beginning of March the Colonial Minister in high spirits expected Oom Paul's arrival at a near date. The truth, alas, was no such thing. On the way instead was the tough patriarch's own dispatch—a fateful foreshadowing. With unwavering will he pressed for terms which in part were impossible. Instance his first sweeping demand for a revision of relations:

> The superseding of the Convention of London . . . because in several respects it has already virtually ceased to exist; because in other respects it has no more cause for existence; because it is injurious to the dignity of an independent Republic; because the very name and the continual arguments on the question of suzerainty, which since the conclusion of this Convention no longer exists, are used as a pretext, especially by a libellous press . . . for intentionally bringing about misunderstanding and false relations between England and the Republic. . . .[3]

One fact here is essential to this biography. It is not Chamberlain but Kruger who injects the word "suzerainty" into the argument. By repudiating the term he brought about its reassertion, as we shall see, by the whole British Government.

Nor was this all. He desired to incorporate Swaziland, and

[1] C.8063, p. 5.

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 5 and 6. Chamberlain to Sir Hercules Robinson, February 15, 1896.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 12-14, No. 20, February 25, 1896. State President to the High Commissioner.

more so that he might have a seaport of his own at Kosi Bay.[1] Further, he asked not unnaturally for the revocation of Rhodes's Charter. In return he held out a prospect of commercial advantages to Britain and to British subjects in the Republic. But of political redress for the Uitlanders he breathed no word. In politics Kruger was somewhat of the Cyclops with one eye.

For futile weeks the correspondence lingered. Towards the end of March, Chamberlain intimated through the High Commissioner that unless the President modified his attitude a visit could do no good and the invitation must be considered as withdrawn.[2]

With a clenched grasp the unalterable "old gentleman" at Pretoria held to the very programme communicated immediately after Jameson's surrender to Consul von Herff and telegraphed by him to Berlin, where, it is fair to say, the fear was awakened that the Boers might go too far. "In pursuing these aims", said the German Consul, "the Transvaal Government foresees the possibility of war with England."[3] The President was both sincere and shrewd in rejecting the idea of a German Protectorate. He did not wish to exchange one kind of subordination for another. None the less his ideas by necessity made him more friendly to Germany than to Britain, though he understood neither. A separate State with a seaport of its own, either owned at Kosi Bay or controlled at Delagoa Bay; a free hand to play off at call either Britain or Germany against the other; perhaps predominance at last in all South Africa, especially over Rhodes, the son of Belial, and all his devices—this was Kruger's dream. It was incompatible with permanent peace. He felt, as we have just seen, that this might be so. Lest his policy should fail he accumulated his armaments.

Far as yet was the Colonial Secretary from realising the breadth and depth of the abyss between the two points of view. With warm good faith, on the representations of several persons

[1] Which Lord Ripon had prevented. See his *Life* by Lucien Wolf, vol. ii. pp. 229-230. This remained one of Kruger's sorest grievances: "England cut off the Transvaal's last outlet to the sea." *Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, vol. ii. pp. 252-253.

[2] C.8063, pp. 15 & 16, 23. Chamberlain to Robinson, March 26, 1896, and April 27.

[3] The words are important: "Bei Verfolgung dieser Ziele sieht Transvaalregierung Möglichkeit eines Krieges mit England voraus" (January 4, *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. xi. p. 35).

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who claimed to know the Boer President's mind, he had welcomed the idea of the London visit and tendered his invitation. Now when discussion for two months had ended in a breakdown, he overcame annoyance and concluded the affair with civility.

IV

On May 8 he reviewed the situation in a speech thought by his hearers to equal, and by some to exceed, his effort in February. "The House while he spoke presented one of those scenes which flash forth half a dozen times in a Session. All the benches were crowded. Members filled the long side galleries, whilst some score were content to stand at the bar throughout the full hour the speech occupied in delivery. The Strangers' Galleries were filled to the topmost range of seats. Representatives of foreign Powers looked on from the diplomatic gallery. The peers struggled for places like the crowd waiting at the pit-entrance of the Haymarket Theatre.[1] Through long passages he was continually cheered.

We must remember how deeply though how diversely feelings had been changed in a few weeks. On the one hand the complicity of Rhodes with the conspiracy in Johannesburg had been exposed by the publication of the cipher telegrams with their odious stock-jobbing jargon. There was a revulsion against him, but it was tempered by his bravery in facing the Matabele rebellion. There was a stronger revulsion against Kruger and his system. The manner of his refusal to visit England suggested antagonism of purposes rather than friendly feeling. Four of the reform leaders, Lionel Phillips, Frank Rhodes, George Farrar and Hays Hammond had just been condemned to death for high treason, while harsh sentences of imprisonment and fine were passed upon their companions. There was an instant British movement for revising these sentences. That question was still under consideration at Pretoria. Though revision was certain, so far there had been no sign of magnanimity.

Harcourt in Parliament adopted a powerful but too limited method. Basing himself on the cipher telegrams, he made a resounding attack on what he described in effect as a vile

[1] H. W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, 1895–1900, p. 57.

mixture of flaunting ambition, unscrupulous greed, and immoral levity. He acquitted Rhodes personally of having been actuated by lust for lucre, but could not say the same of some of the men about him. The Liberal statesman demanded that Rhodes should be removed from the managing directorship of the Chartered Company and that its Governing Board should be otherwise reconstituted.

But the Colonial Secretary and the Unionist Cabinet had decided that a different policy was imperative. Rhodes, after all, had not sanctioned the criminal lunacy of the Raid. His political downfall was his penalty. His better work must not be undone. Kruger's methods, both in internal and external affairs, had been the root of the mischief. Patience and discrimination were required in dealing with the Transvaal, but the British position in South Africa must be at all costs upheld.

This was the case now stated with overmastering effect by Chamberlain in his immediate reply to Harcourt. The cipher telegrams, he urged, must not be allowed to obscure the permanent issues. There were two aspects, both vital. "Our first object is to preserve our position as the paramount State. It matters not whether we call ourselves suzerain or paramount, but it is an essential feature in our policy that the authority and influence of this country should be predominant in South Africa. The second object is to bring about a better state of feeling, union and concord between the two great races that now inhabit that country."[1] To the Dutch race he paid high tribute, as often before. Yet the magnanimity shown after Majuba by Gladstone's Government—he recalled his membership of it and hushed the House—had never met from the Boers the response it was intended to win. Unless the admitted grievances of the Uitlanders were remedied and Boer suspicion of British designs at the same time dispelled there would be no health in South Africa.

As for Rhodes, the Colonial Secretary emphasised the judgment he had pronounced in February, and was to repeat in a more critical hour to come. "But for Englishmen like Mr. Rhodes our English history would be much poorer [loud Ministerial cheers] and our British dominions would be much smaller.

[1] May 8, 1896. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xl., col. 907.

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[Renewed cheers.]"[1] Into the origins of the Raid a searching parliamentary enquiry would be held.

The most impressive passage of this cool, dominating speech is not given here. It will be recalled more aptly a few pages ahead. Some ardent Jingoes had spoken of an ultimatum to Kruger. It would mean war. Chamberlain replied: "Sir, I do not propose to discuss such a contingency as that. A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged." With prescient instinct he enlarged upon that theme.[2]

V

Then, what was to be the next resort? The hope of face to face meeting and settlement with Kruger in London had failed. The alternative meant reversion to conventional methods, dilatory, perhaps interminable. Diplomatic correspondence had to do its best or worst. The combatants on paper were some 8000 miles apart. Argument became as elaborate as siege and defence conducted by Vauban or Coehoorn.

From this time the war of dispatches lasted for more than three years without bringing the disputants one hair's breadth nearer. The documents fill serried blue-books—of "depth immeasurable" like the shields in Milton. They are material for history proper. By themselves they contribute little to the living records of biography proper. A short summary must serve.

Imagine the conditions behind the blue-books. It is a conflict of ideas and characters. Chamberlain is reinforced by the combined ability of the Colonial Department assisted by the Law Officers. With Kruger are Dr. Leyds and the rest, well able in acuteness and tenacity of disputation to hold their own with any European chancellery. Neither side alters by a jot its fundamental principles: neither pushes logical conclusions to active extremity. Every sentence is studied and restudied. When received by the other side every sentence is submitted to a microscopic process. Months and months pass between receipt of a dispatch and the reply.

[1] May 8. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xl. col. 920.
[2] *Ibid.* col. 914.

That no interference with the internal affairs of the Transvaal can be allowed is the Boer contention. The British contention is that the article limiting the sovereignty of the Transvaal and forbidding it to "conclude any Treaty or engagement" with a foreign Power unless by the Queen's sanction must be strictly construed. Throughout the whole period the question of the heritage of Delagoa Bay played a constant part in the mind of the British Cabinet. If Portugal for financial reasons had to part with it, or lease it, England meant to assert her treaty-right of pre-emption. But that final enclosure and sealing up of the Transvaal within the British sphere German policy would do its utmost to defeat. It is idle, or else below either side of the argument, to separate the South African question from the wider forces of world-policy already setting up the currents which were to gather volume and impetus and within two decades more were to sweep mankind into the Great War.

VI

No serious historical student to-day treats "paramountcy" or "suzerainty" as a verbal quarrel artificially exaggerated by Chamberlain's choice of one provocative word. It was not so. Kruger himself had revived a word used by the late Liberal Government.[1] The real contention never was about the name but about the substance. Kruger's aspiration towards absolute independence was not only honest but possessed. The hated restrictions, especially on his treaty-making power, which he could not try as yet to break by any open blow he hoped by degrees to weaken and dissolve.

Chamberlain had to watch and prevent the least attempt in that direction. This was the gravity of his trusteeship.[2]

[1] Mr. Sydney Buxton (now Lord Buxton) when Under-Secretary for the Colonies in Lord Rosebery's administration, used the following words in answer to a parliamentary question on July 2, 1894: "Of course I do not know what the intention of the Government of 1884 may have been; but taking the two conventions, that of 1881 and that of 1884, the hon. gentleman will see that that of 1884 affects the Articles of the Convention of 1881, but does not touch the preamble, and it is the preamble that has reference to the question of suzerainty" (Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxvi. col. 686).

[2] The late Mr. J. F. X. Merriman, a South African Liberal, who first suggested in 1884 that Chamberlain should be Colonial Minister, wrote to Sir Hercules Robinson as early as September 1887: "The less educated Boers . . . are being led to regard

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It was brought to the Colonial Secretary's notice by his Department that as long ago as the November before the Raid, the South African Republic, without notifying Her Majesty's Government, had concluded an extradition Treaty with Holland. In August 1896 the Colonial Secretary called the notice of Pretoria to this undesirable precedent. Pretoria did not apologise, but complied with the forms, and the Treaty was sanctioned. But further the Colonial Secretary pointed out that a similar extradition Treaty signed with Portugal as far back as 1893 had never been submitted. The Transvaal Government contended that it had never been ratified at Lisbon, and claimed in effect full liberty of negotiation with foreign countries up to the actual signature of a "Treaty or Engagement". This was a dangerous subtlety.

Presently, that happened which was bound to happen. Vexatious questions arose on the borderland between internal and external affairs. The Volksraad passed a stringent law muzzling the Press. This was exasperating but within the Convention. Not so other measures. The Aliens Immigration Law imposed a new system of restrictions and passes. It was exceeded by the despotic Aliens Expulsion Law empowering the Transvaal executive to expel Uitlanders at will. The Law Officers of the Crown decided that these enactments violated rights of entry into, and residence in, the Transvaal expressly secured by the Convention.

This time, as in the Drifts crisis, the Colonial Secretary grasped the nettle and with the same success. The energy of his representations, backed by British naval and military movements, showed plainly that at need action would bear out words. The Volksraad repealed the Aliens Immigration Law, but without acknowledging the British protest; and presently passed a resolution for amending the Aliens Expulsion Act by allowing appeal to the Courts.

In May, 1897, when the war of dispatches had already lasted

Germany as a possible saviour of what they are pleased to call their oppressed country. . . . The acquisition by Germany of Delagoa Bay would at once convert that influence, increased as it has been of late years, into an element of extreme danger to British interests, and it might even jeopardise our hold upon the whole of South Africa." The growth of that danger chiefly caused the Rhodes conspiracy and the Raid and had become one of the world questions. See for general reference Laurence, *Life of John Xavier Merriman*, pp. 116-117. That book does not contain the quotation just given from the Chamberlain Papers.

more than a year the Boer Government more stiffly than ever maintained the legality and righteousness of all their proceedings.[1]

Their thesis impugned the basis of the London Convention—the whole British case concerning supremacy, suzerainty, paramountcy, predominance, hegemony. Call it what you will. The thing at stake was the same whatever the term. President Kruger struck hard at the thing itself. He ventured to propose that the President of the Swiss Republic should arbitrate between Britain and the Transvaal, as between equally independent powers.

To this point had it come on the eve of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, nearly eighteen months after Chamberlain in his most conciliatory mood had invited Kruger to London.

This ends the first phase of the paper-war. The future had to be fully reconsidered by the Colonial Secretary and the Government. The last disquisition from Pretoria he left for five whole months unanswered. Then he expressed the policy of the whole Unionist Cabinet in terms which opened a sterner stage of this grim contention—hitherto as stubborn and inconclusive as one of our typical naval wars with the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The Transvaal continued to arm more heavily in proportion to the number of its burghers than any other State in the world.

VII

It is absorbing to watch Chamberlain's varying phases through the year and a half after the Raid. Naturally no Hamlet but a person of the promptest habit, he had to consider the "to be or not to be" in repeated debate within himself. First he had to give up the lively hope that Kruger would visit England. Next he had to recognise slowly that the iron-hearted veteran, instead of meditating concession, was entrenching for resistance. How would it end? Interminable verbiage and increasing weakness might lead to the loss of South Africa and make his tenure of office discreditable to himself and calamitous to the Empire. Peace at any price he had repudiated all his life since as a youth he stood up to Bright. But when he considered war his mind recoiled as well as his soul.

[1] May 7, 1897, C.8721, 1897, p. 6.

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When it first appeared pretty plain that the "old gentleman" would not come, Fairfield reported the pleasure of the extreme Tory group and their confidence that the Government would be driven to war. Chamberlain minuted:

I quite understand the little game. But I do not mean to carry out a policy for the benefit of these gentry. . . . I do not mind the noisy exaltation of the Jingo party. . . . I should like to infuse a little more spirit into Sir H. Robinson and I wish he would show his teeth occasionally. But for all that I am not at all anxious for war, and do not believe that it will come (April 8, 1896).

A month later, amidst heedless talk of an ultimatum, Chamberlain in an earnest passage of a speech already noticed uttered the warning which has been reserved for full quotation here:

A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be in the nature of a Civil War. It would be a long war, a bitter war, and a costly war; and as I have pointed out already, it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations would hardly be long enough to extinguish. Of course there might be contingencies in which a great Power has to face even such an alternative as this . . . but to go to war with President Kruger in order to force upon him reforms in the internal affairs of his State, with which successive Secretaries of State, standing in this place, have repudiated all right of interference, that would have been a course of action as immoral as it would have been unwise.[1]

Further, to clear his own mind, he wrote down for himself in these weeks a memorandum on the alternatives, and this concluded his thinking out:

I shall never go into such a war with a light heart, and at the present time we have no reason either of right or interest which would justify the enterprise. . . . I do not believe there will be war—but Kruger will not be wise if he dismisses that possibility altogether from his calculations, or assumes that if it comes the result will be favourable to him. . . . In spite of all this our business is to bring about a fair settlement. We shall not do it, I admit, by a policy of empty menaces or arbitrary impatience

[1] House of Commons, Hansard, May 8, 1896. Fourth Series, vol. xl. cols. 914-915.

—neither, I think, shall we succeed if we underestimate our reserve force and allow Kruger to have it all his own way.[1]

Convinced that all the right was on its own side, Pretoria so far had given him no aid nor promise. The harsh pursuit of the Reform leaders; the death sentences, though commuted; the rapacious fines; legislation for further subjection of the Uitlanders—these things deepened the impression of Kruger's rigidity and diminished hope of his wisdom.

VIII

In a memorandum for the Cabinet, November 10, 1896,[2] the Colonial Minister insisted that henceforth British policy, while still hoping for the best, must prepare for all risks by a considerable increase of the standing garrison in South Africa. He admitted that the retiring High Commissioner thought "the proposed strengthening of the forces unnecessary and undesirable"; but this view was contrary to all his other information.

He put his finger on one fact. The Boers were rapidly amassing their armaments:

It appears from information in the possession of the Intelligence Department that during the last nine months they have already imported 50 field and position guns, 26 maxims, 45,000 rifles, more than 20,000 rounds of large ammunition, and 30,000,000 rounds of rifle ammunition. It is probable that these returns do not include all the importations and there is no reason to believe that the purchases are not still going on. . . . I am in favour of greatly reinforcing the garrisons in South Africa until they amount to at least 10,000 men, including a large proportion of cavalry and artillery. . . . I believe that the adoption of the policy here indicated will prevent the Boers from putting forward impossible claims and from taking aggressive action and will greatly strengthen the hands of our representatives in the communications which they may have to make to the Transvaal Government in the next few months.

The War Office protested that not even 5000 additional men could be sent to South Africa without upsetting our system of

[1] 1896. Otherwise undated. Certainly written between June and October.
[2] Chamberlain Papers.

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linked battalions for home and overseas service; and that Parliament would have to be asked to increase the establishment. Against the military and financial objections the Colonial Secretary did not press his proposal, but this affair deepened the mistrust of the old War Office system long felt by him as by the nation.

Then came the tension in the spring of 1897, when Boer policy seemed to be driving towards a struggle. The Orange Free State had entered into an alliance, offensive and defensive, with its neighbour. Kruger presented his long-suspended claims to indemnities for the Raid; and his demands were not soothing. For material damages, £677,938 : 3 : 3 precisely; and for moral and intellectual damages, £1,000,000. The diplomatic breaches of Article IV. and the domestic infringements of Article XIV. of the Convention were before the Cabinet.[1] It was evident to Chamberlain that a warning shot must be fired across Mr. Kruger's bows, to avert a conflict. Between the principal Ministers grave communications passed. The Prime Minister was abroad.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

April 8, 1897.—At a meeting called at my request to-day, present Lansdowne, Balfour, Goschen, Beach and myself, we discussed the situation in South Africa, when the following facts were admitted. The Government of the Transvaal has armed and is persistently arming, until now it has a stock of artillery, rifles and ammunition of all sorts, enough to furnish a European army. Only recently between 50 and 60 cannon have been forwarded from Germany, and an order has been given to the Maxim Nordenfeldt Company for a large supply of quick-firing guns—both small calibre and 12-pounders.

Meanwhile we have only one battery at the Cape; and the War Office agreed that in the event of war being declared, they could not defend the Cape Colony. . . . Under these circumstances, I have asked that a

[1] "Article XIV. All persons, other than natives conforming themselves to the laws of the South African Republic (*a*) will have full liberty with their families, to enter, travel, or reside in any part of the South African Republic; (*b*) they will be entitled to hire or possess houses, manufactories, warehouses, shops and premises; (*c*) they may carry on their commerce either in person or by any agents they may think fit to employ; (*d*) they will not be subject in respect of their persons or property or in respect of their commerce or industry to any taxes whether general or local, other than those which are or may be imposed upon citizens of the said Republic."

brigade of Cavalry, a regiment of Infantry and two field batteries (altogether about 3500 men) should be sent out after Easter. . . . I am requested to write to you and to ask your assent to what we may determine on these lines. Lansdowne still takes the view that it is desirable to do nothing. Beach thinks that the force should be sent chiefly for political reasons. Balfour and Goschen agree . . . if they [the Boers] see we are in earnest, I believe they will give way, as they have always done.

Consenting yet anxious was the Prime Minister:

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

April 16, 1897.—(*Beaulieu, Alpes Maritimes.*)— . . . As you have followed the matter closely I have no hesitation in agreeing to your opinion which has been maturing for some time. . . . The other point I wish to bear in mind is that a war with the Transvaal will have a reaction on European politics which may be pernicious. The Emperor William's dream is to have a strong Navy[1] . . . if he could get up a strong sentimental feeling in favour of himself or (which is the same thing) against us, it is not off the cards that he might (1) give a German husband whom he could trust to the young Queen, and (2) conclude a Kriegsverein with the Dutch Government. Now the one soft sentimental spot in the Dutch heart is for their kinsmen in the Transvaal. For reasons therefore unconnected with Africa I should look with something like dismay to a Transvaal war. It might mean the necessity of protecting the North-East of England as well as the South.

But the Colonial Secretary was convinced that drift would mean war for sure and that his method would prevent it or at least postpone:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

April 19, 1897.— . . . The situation is most difficult and is made much worse by the political and international considerations indicated in your letter. . . . I have come to the conclusion that there is only one way of avoiding these two possible contingencies, and that is by convincing

[1] The preparation for the Bill of 1897 which founded the new German Navy had been thoroughly considered, especially by Admiral von Tirpitz, since 1894. Hans Hallmann, *Krügerdepesche und Flottenfrage*, especially pp. 25-38.

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Kruger that we are in earnest and mean to defend the Convention with all our strength. My hope is that he will then give way as he has done before. . . . You might perhaps think it well to communicate our determination to France and Germany, assuring them that we have no desire to attack or intention of attacking the independence of the Transvaal, but that we intend to maintain our rights in their integrity. . . .

A modest military reinforcement went out to Natal, and at the same time the Admiralty sent a small squadron to Delagoa Bay. However sullen in reluctance, however resolved not to recognise Chamberlain's will as the cause of compliance, but to assign other reasons, Kruger gave way. That is, in the sense of tactical retreat. Repealed was the Aliens Immigration Bill; revised the Aliens Expulsion Bill; moderated the harrying of the British press on the Rand. The ready slang of the day said that once more Kruger had "climbed down". This prudential descent was but temporary and far from implying any true improvement in the state of the controversy. For some weeks, during the war scare, work on the Pretoria forts was pushed on day and night. Then, the Transvaal reply, as we saw, proposed, though by way of arbitration, the very foreign interference which Article IV. of the settlement in 1884 was drawn to exclude.

IX

Chamberlain saw that the Imperial Government sorely needed in South Africa a different representative. Younger, with better eyes and ears, with more vigour and fibre, yet with a searching intellect and a judicial temperament. Sir Hercules Robinson, for former services of high merit in their time, was raised to the peerage as Lord Rosmead. His retirement must come soon. His successor ought to be someone whom the whole nation irrespective of party would acclaim. Could the phoenix be found?

For six months Chamberlain pursued enquiries and weighed merits.

At the beginning of 1897, he made up his mind and defied routine. On January 8 he wrote to Lord Salisbury a surprising letter. It suggested that the Chairman of the Inland Revenue Board should become High Commissioner in South Africa and

Governor at the Cape. Milner's name in this connection had been originally mentioned by his staunch friend Lord Selborne, second in command at the Colonial Office.

> The man whom I have in mind is Sir Alfred Milner, who is anxious to have work out of England. I have not spoken to him but think he might be induced to accept.[1]

Years before, as we know, Chamberlain had met the rising young man in Egypt and formed of him a high opinion warmed to admiration by reading *England in Egypt*. Since then he had marked the vogue on all sides of Sir Alfred's praises; and lately had asked him to dinner on a few occasions. About to be called to fill the most critical post in the Empire except Chamberlain's own—who would have to pay the biggest expenses should his nominee fail—Milner had not completed his forty-third year. The Prime Minister replied in an incidental sentence of a letter on various things: "Your choice of Milner for the Cape will, I think, be a success".

The Colonial Secretary then sent to the Chairman of the Inland Revenue Board a verbal message through Selborne. Milner attended at the Colonial Office on January 18. Chamberlain in his testing way on these occasions did not at first disclose all his mind. First he asked whether his visitor would accept the post of permanent Under Secretary for the Colonies, made vacant by the breakdown of Sir Robert Meade. This, as Chamberlain expected, Milner declined. The Colonial Secretary then asked him whether he was prepared to become High Commissioner in South Africa and Governor of Cape Colony; but dwelt candidly on the exceptional gravity of the task, and offered his nominee time to make up his mind.

But Milner said at once: "I'll do it".[2] It was a good way to begin with Chamberlain. Warned and kindled—a vista of duty, hazard and perhaps greatness, opened to his imagination—the new proconsul-designate went away sworn to secrecy until formalities were accomplished. So began a partnership which was to leave its indelible mark on the records. Sir Michael Hicks

[1] Chamberlain to Salisbury, January 8, 1897.

[2] Lord Milner's account in a conversation with the present writer, October 6, 1920.

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Beach, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, incensed at the sudden manner in which his best hand had been taken from him, had a momentary inclination to raise obstacles. Milner showed his mettle. He resolved to leave the Treasury service and trust to his pen again, should his South African chance be lost by refusal of immediate release. This hitch was smoothed. The Queen's approval was won. In the middle of February the announcement of the new High Commissioner's name stirred all the newspapers to a unison of eulogy seldom sounded.

In praise of the new High Commissioner and of the Colonial Minister's judgment in selection the Opposition journals vied with the Ministerial. Some of them recalled Jowett's certainty that Milner had a splendid career before him; others Dean Church's words long ago about "the finest flower of culture that had been reared in the University of that generation". All dwelt upon the auspicious circumstances that Lord Rosmead's successor was in the prime of manhood and unconnected with South African sections and interests.

Never in living memory had any appointment been received with more applause. The speeding banquet at the end of March represented all the best of both parties. Redoubled enthusiasm hailed the guest of the evening. One letter from Sir William Harcourt said that he was "deserving of all praise and all affection". Asquith, who presided, spoke as one of Milner's oldest friends. "We know that he takes with him as clear an intellect, as sympathetic an imagination, and, if the need should arise, a power of resolution as tenacious and inflexible as belongs to any man of our acquaintance." Another letter from Lord Rosebery said "he has a brilliant past and has a still greater future before him, for he has the union of intellect with fascination which makes men mount high". Milner replied modestly to the toast of his health, but used words worth attention. "I have the fatal habit of seeing that there is a great deal to be said on both sides, and I am cursed with what is called a cross-bench mind. On one question, however, I have never been able to see the other side, and that is precisely this question of Imperial union."

When the Colonial Secretary rose his remarks upon the overmastering necessity of maintaining our position "as paramount

power in South Africa" were too strong for most of his Liberal hearers.[1] But he balanced that emphasis when he too enlarged upon the goodwill and hope attending Milner's mission.

> Although the situation which is present to our minds is not free from anxiety or even danger, yet I am sanguine enough to believe that the problem before us and before him is not an insoluble problem. For what is it? It is to reconcile and to persuade to live together in peace and goodwill two races whose common interests are immeasurably greater than any differences which may unfortunately exist.[2]

Yet we have seen from the Ministerial correspondence disclosed in this chapter that at the moment of the banquet at the Café Monico the South African crisis on the Aliens Immigration Bill and the Aliens Expulsion Bill looked ominous. Enjoined by the Colonial Secretary to hasten his departure, Milner left England on April 17, but when he landed at Cape Town the Transvaal Government had complied and pressing anxiety was soon dissipated.

X

Believing still in his preferred face-to-face method, Chamberlain often thought of visiting South Africa—of going to Kruger since Kruger would not come to him. First, sheer drive of duty at home prevented the voyage; and then Milner's position made it undesirable.

But it happened that while the new High Commissioner was on the sea, Dr. Leyds was in London. That accomplished young Hollander was popularly supposed the Mephistopheles of the Krugerite régime. Here was the chance for face-to-face discussion next in value to conversation with Kruger himself. Despite some flurries of doubt in the Department, the Transvaal Secretary of State was invited to lunch with the Colonial Minister and Lord Selborne. There was frank talk. Dr. Leyds personally

[1] Milner himself wrote in his *Diary*: "I spoke for about 15 minutes fairly well. Chamberlain astonished us by a very political and rather bellicose speech" (*Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 35). Two things are to be said. Chamberlain's ultimatum to the Transvaal on the breaches of Article IV. had not yet brought compliance. Early war still seemed a possibility. His determined words were necessarily addressed as much to Pretoria as to his audience.

[2] Café Monico, Saturday evening, March 29, 1897.

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made a favourable impression, as he did at this time on nearly all who met him.

In a note jotted down immediately after this luncheon (May 15) Chamberlain recorded:

> I assured him that no one in this country entertained any design on their independence, and I urged that by giving us satisfaction in the matter of the Convention they would take away the excuse for forcible interference in their affairs. . . . The whole conversation was conducted in the most friendly and conciliatory spirit, and Dr. Leyds seemed to be sincerely anxious to remove causes of irritation and to be hopeful of a satisfactory result.

Matters might have gone much further than this—the South African War might not have happened—had the agreeable Dr. Leyds been more discerning or Kruger less obstinate. Chamberlain, to the alarm of some of his advisers, meditated audacities of goodwill. He of all men was prepared on two conditions to give the Boers the long-coveted railway concession through Swaziland with their own seaport at Kosi Bay.[1] The conditions were that the Boers should leave their foreign relations in British hands and enfranchise the Uitlanders. So far was he prepared to go for a sure settlement; so little was he an aggressive Jingo in this business though adamant in meeting encroachment.

After the first talk Leyds seemed all eagerness. When he returned to London for the Queen's Jubilee season his tone had changed. The truth is that Dr. Leyds was more the servant of Kruger's doggedness than its prompter. In the middle of June he declared that his Government must adhere to its proposal for foreign arbitration, and he complained of the British military reinforcements in South Africa.[2] Chamberlain answered at once that one additional regiment and two batteries in Natal were a fleabite by comparison with the "immense stores of arms and ammunition" which the Transvaal had been importing for eighteen months. But he again deprecated renewal of controversy by "written dispatches which a personal negotiation might entirely supersede". And for the latter purpose he asked Dr. Leyds to Highbury.[3] The invitation was not accepted.

[1] Secretary of State's minute, June 6, 1897.

[2] Leyds to Chamberlain, June 14, 1897.

[3] Chamberlain to Leyds, June 17, 1897.

This episode is a sidelight on history. What it brings out is to Chamberlain's high credit.

Kruger's only policy was to guard his independence by internal mastery and foreign aid—to maintain Boer ascendancy over the Uitlanders by force of arms and to keep in touch with every influence abroad which might serve him at a pinch. Convinced of the justice of his cause, as in due time a sufficient number of the British people would be convinced of theirs, his racial patriotism was a political religion as intense as his Dopper creed. In the long run, as he saw it, he must either yield political control of his country to the Uitlanders or fight; and rather than yield in that sense he would fight to the death.

But these reflections go a little beyond this part of the narrative. The mist of futurity that no mortal may remove hid the ultimate event from the Colonial Minister and the Transvaal President alike. Milner had yet to traverse months of probation before he could form a settled judgment of his own. In the high summer of 1897 the tension of controversy was eased again both in South Africa and at home. Amidst the centuried memories of the Queen's Year and its world-wide associations South Africa ceased to be an engrossing topic. It became a secondary though marked feature of the whole Imperial view then opened as never before to general imagination. It was the public belief that Milner by intellect and persuasiveness together would bring about in the end some peaceful compromise with the Boers. Chamberlain, like all great popular leaders of his type, forgot his recent foreboding and shared that optimism of Imperial sentiment which he did most to inspire.

BOOK XII

1895–1899

CHAPTER LIII

SOCIAL PROGRESS—AN AMERICAN SETTLEMENT—"TOWARDS KHARTUM"

(1895–1897)

EDUCATION Bills and Cabinet Differences—Then Chamberlain's Turn—Significance of the Workman's Compensation Bill—"Social Insurance"—"The Revolutionary Principle" and Conservative Protests—Lord Salisbury and "The Spokesman of Our Party"—Chamberlain and the Venezuelan Settlement—His Visit to America secures the Compromise—The Future of Anglo-American Relations—Remarkable Correspondence with Mr. Olney—Turkish Misrule and the Radical Tradition—Recovery of the Sudan?—Chamberlain and the Measured Advance.

I

IF these first two years of office had raised the Imperialist, what had become of the Radical? Whatever might be his fortunes in his chosen sphere of colonial administration, to confine himself to it never had been his intention. He meant to take a full part in the shaping of general policy and especially of domestic measures. In the collective counsels of the Unionist Government he was an exceptional force. Effectiveness in Cabinet deliberation is well known to be a quality by itself, often denied to statesmen weightily furnished in mind and to others brisk enough in party debate. That quality, requiring immediate acumen with expression both prompt and discriminating, Chamberlain possessed to the rarest degree.

He looked to pervade the administration, for all its Conservative majority, by his familiar ideas of social progress. Reassuring an old Birmingham supporter after the Ministry was formed, he asserted that "in spite of Gladstonian predictions" the Government would not forget their pledge to devote the greater part of its time to the people's welfare.

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His hopes in that sense were ardent and far-reaching in the summer of 1895. On lines of social insurance he aspired to do for England what Bismarck had done for Germany. This was his conception when no man could imagine that the next few months would bring forth a Cleveland manifesto, a Jameson Raid, a Kaiser's telegram; or that soon afterwards ceaseless and cumulative crises would ensue. Liberalism in its heyday was largely thwarted by the troubles of the second Gladstone Government in Imperial and foreign as well as Irish affairs. In like manner, the Unionist Government of 1895 was more and more engrossed by external emergencies in unprecedented succession.

II

As he expected much from his Conservative colleagues, he had to concede much to them. On his side the less agreeable part of the compromise had first to be faced. Almost at the beginning, education was the familiar difficulty, and it would recur.

Since the old Liberal ascendancy in the early 'eighties, the established Church and the Catholics had steadily increased their electoral influence relatively to the Nonconformists. Lord Salisbury's Government was pledged to relieve "the intolerable strain" upon denominational schools, then receiving State grants only, by comparison with Board schools enjoying rate-aid as well. This pledge Chamberlain was entirely willing to honour. Brought long ago to see that the dual system must be accepted, since neither half of the nation could overcome the other, he now recognised that denominational schools must receive more support from the State in the interests of general education. Yet he still insisted that sectarian instruction must be self-supported.

Stubborn on this point was the Old Adam of his dissenting tradition. He still could not do justice to the Conservative case —that compelling denominationalists to pay taxes for Board schools was just as obnoxious to consciences as compelling nonconformists to pay rates for voluntary schools. Again this question more than any other was still apt to give him trouble in his own city. The one impossible thing for him to accept at present, or to get accepted by Birmingham, was local rate-aid

for the denominationalists without popular control. This was the very thing projected before he had been six months in office. When he learned the scope and character of the draft Education Bill prepared toward the end of 1895 for the coming session, his wrath was warm:

TO THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE

Highbury, December 15, 1895.— . . . They are the very maddest proposals I have seen in the course of my life. They would absolutely break down, in the interests of the Church and the Roman Catholics, the so-called Compromise of 1870. . . .

For myself I have fully recognised the necessity of making great concessions to the feelings of my present allies. I have given up altogether the idea of Disestablishment, as outside practical politics. I am ready to make such provision as may be absolutely necessary to prevent the extinction of Voluntary Schools. But I could not hold up my head for a day after I had consented to such a Bill as is now suggested. . . .

The Duke, nominally responsible, had little to do with it. He who had played his massive part in other connections, and with a little more animation might have played a greater, was a singular Minister of Education—"dull, silent, impassive" in that uncongenial capacity, as a suffering subordinate has recorded. But even his monumental composure must have been disturbed by the blast of protest from Highbury. The draft Bill was revised at once. Omitted was the provision of direct rate-aid to Voluntary Schools. By the altered Bill, still irksome, Chamberlain was ready to stand.

The unlucky measure, introduced in the session of 1896, was an elaborate attempt to reorganise the whole existing system. Education, primary and technical, was to be decentralised and better co-ordinated. The County Councils and those of the county boroughs, working through their statutory committees, were to become the paramount local authorities. Liberals denounced the Bill as an attack on School Boards. Church party and Catholics condemned the refusal of rate-aid. Supported by the Irish Nationalists and carried on Second Reading by the enormous majority of 267, the Bill satisfied no one and was destroyed chiefly by the indomitable obstruction of the Liberals

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alone. In Committee five nights were required to pass two lines, while twelve hundred amendments were yet to be moved. John Morley likened the helpless measure to "a stranded whale". The humiliating withdrawal of the Bill made the session a fiasco for legislative purposes, damaged Balfour's credit as Leader of the House—a loss he soon redeemed—and exhibited the triumph of an outnumbered but hardy Opposition over a powerful Ministry.

Mutinous in Birmingham were surviving veterans of the old Education League. At a meeting in the Town Hall the Colonial Secretary's bold dexterity carried his argument. Since voluntary schools could not be abolished they must not be starved. "I have changed my mind; that change is one to which I came eight or nine years ago."[1]

But it was not a Bill on which he could take a prominent part without embittering contention. Markedly he abstained from debate except when his own department was concerned.

For next session a new measure had to be prepared, and the Government took in sail. The Prime Minister and a bare majority of the Cabinet agreed with the Colonial Secretary that action should be confined to direct assistance in necessitous cases. In 1897 a simplified Bill handsomely increased the State grant to Voluntary Schools. Later in that session the Government, with Chamberlain's particular approval, passed a small supplementary Bill for relieving impoverished Board Schools.

Between Balfour as Leader of the House and the Colonial Minister there had been throughout a considerable disagreement as to both principles and procedure. When the Colonial Secretary carried his point by a bare majority of the Cabinet towards the end of 1896, he hastened to express regret in having been compelled to oppose a colleague he so much liked and esteemed. Balfour answered that the little note though bringing pleasure said no more than he had already confidently believed.

> I can assure you that I had rather do business with you even on subjects where there may be some difference of opinion between us than with some of my colleagues in matters where there is perfect agreement. Can I say more?[2]

[1] Town Hall, Birmingham, May 1, 1896.

[2] Balfour to Chamberlain, December 2, 1896.

More he could not say. This glimpse shows the spirit which kept the Unionist alliance united in action, despite differences in council, through so many years. We see how Chamberlain, sometimes at the expense of his own feelings and interests, contributed to compromise and stability. Next we shall see how much was conceded to him by Conservatives in their turn.

III

The Colonial Secretary was bent on signalising the Queen's Year by one of the outstanding social reforms of the sixty years' reign.

As we know, he had long been determined upon complete reform of the law relating to employers' liability for accidents suffered by their workpeople. In our days of legislative insurance against the ills and perils of industrial life, we do not easily realise how intrepid was his novel method; how solid the adverse array of interests and prejudices; or what degree of tenacious skill was required for success. First he gained the assent, though by no means the unanimous enthusiasm, of a Cabinet almost entirely Conservative or Whig; then, with surpassing ability in detail as in general grasp, and with persuasive good temper, he guided through the House of Commons a measure necessarily as complicated as beneficent.

That measure was the Workmen's Compensation Bill of 1897. Familiar was the economic disaster as well as the sorrow to working-class households in those days when men, carried to hospital or brought home on stretchers, were injured, maimed for life, or killed; and in nine-tenths of the cases either a right of compensation did not exist or could not be proved. For several years Chamberlain had pursued his enquiries amongst employers and workers alike. The confused or callous state of the law was in his conviction a grievous tragedy.

We must glance at the history of the question. For more than a generation labour struggled against the legal doctrine of "common employment". A workman was held to have no remedy against the consequences of negligence "upon the part of a fellow-servant when he is acting in discharge of his duty as servant of him who is the common master of both". When this

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principle could be invoked, the master, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, was protected against claims. This injustice became more glaring as machinery multiplied and the scale of undertakings increased. A single concern might employ a thousand "hands" or thousands, mostly as unknown to each other as to the owners. Amending legislation fumbled.

We need not return here to the wrangle between the Liberal Government and the House of Lords which led to the abandonment of Asquith's Bill in 1894. Chamberlain's arguments against it were that it would not apply at all to a large majority of accidents; that it would not touch two-thirds of them; that it would cause every case to be fought; that it would give money to lawyers rather than industrial victims.

Now, the Colonial Secretary was resolved to deal with the question in another manner altogether. The whole argument for years and years had turned upon the issue of negligence—the workman imputing it to the employer or his agents; the employer imputing it to the workman or his mates. By exception gross default on the part of an individual might be recognised. Otherwise who could define negligence? No human being is an automaton. Failure of attention might be caused by a workman being out of sorts but also by an access of high spirits; either by jest or depression; either by a moment of vagrant thought or by eagerness over a detail leading to contact with other parts of the mechanism.

In most cases, as Chamberlain contended, it was impossible to say that an accident was anyone's fault. But, however arising, industrial injuries to workmen were what they were; the consequences to the victims and their dependents could not be altered by logic-chopping. The casualties of industry demanded sympathy and aid like the casualties of war. To his imagination as a social reformer this also was Red Cross Service. Payment for accidents to workmen should fall as automatically on the employer as did the cost of accidents to his machinery.

This simplification, however, was a complete revolution of the law, and was so described for opposite reasons both by adherents and adversaries.

It was one of the happiest days of his parliamentary life when at length on May 3 of the Queen's Year—a fortunate conjunc-

tion—the Workmen's Compensation Bill was introduced into the House of Commons. Owing to the novelty of the experiment and not to imperil the passage of the Bill by overloading, the "revolutionary principle" extended to a long category of trades was not applied to all. Agricultural labourers, seamen and domestic servants were excluded from the scope of the Bill. The benefits of its idea were sure to be extended to them too in time. Meanwhile the scope was wide. Factories, railways, mines, quarries, shipyards, constructional engineering, were included; and in all these cases the Bill assured compensation to injured workmen and excluded the old disputes about negligence. The cost to the employer became a normal charge on the trade. A definite scale of liability enabled him to average that charge and to meet it more easily either by insurance or by direct provision in the business. "Contracting-out" was permissible, but it must be voluntary and it must guarantee to workmen benefits not less than those of the Bill.

IV

The measure was formally in charge of the Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, an excellent, unselfish, colleague, whose doubts Chamberlain had removed. Everyone knew who was the parent of the measure. In the House he was openly its manager.

His speeches on the first and second readings[1] were telling expositions or refutations without a word of adornment. He lived up to his remark in the course of the debates, "whenever I have to make a speech in this House . . . I only have one ambition and that is to express in the fewest possible words, and with the utmost clearness, the views which I hold on the subject on which I have to speak".[2] An ironic phrase came only now and then, as when he remarked that his aim was "relieving the workman not punishing the employer", or rallied those critics who declared they accepted the principle and then "objected to every single provision in it".[3] Massingham, who then edited brilliantly the Liberal *Daily Chronicle*, forgetting party in this cause, gave him fine support and described him as:

[1] May 3 and May 18.
[2] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xlix. col. 789 (May 18).
[3] *Ibid.* col. 794.

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Devilling for Sir Matthew White Ridley; arbitrating, conciliating, reconciling warring interests, and stamping the whole proceedings in the House with that spirit of clear and precise bargaining which has always been Mr. Chamberlain's note in politics.[1]

The controversy cut right across party lines. Many Unionist employers rebelled in the North. Their apprehensions were real at the time, and could only be dispelled by experience. In the House of Commons a Liberal coalowner of shining opulence, Sir James Joicey, declared that "no more important Bill had been introduced during the last fifty years, and if he had been told some time ago a Conservative Government would introduce a measure of such a character he would have been staggered by the information. There was more Socialism pure and simple in the Bill than in any Bill which had been submitted for the last half-century". In the House of Lords that venerable individualist, Lord Wemyss, pronounced that the Conservative party had been "annexed" by Chamberlain. In that House and elsewhere a Conservative coalowner, Lord Londonderry, enlarged on the gloomy theme. He deplored "the dominating will of the Colonial Secretary whose Radical views on home politics we have always regarded with disapproval, however much we may admire him as an Imperialist".

To all whom it might concern, Lord Salisbury replied that on social questions, "Mr. Chamberlain is the spokesman of our party". Discontent amongst the peers was more vocal in private than visible in action. At the end of July they carried the third reading by 69 to 6. Small differences between the two Houses were easily adjusted by Chamberlain's tact in the last phase. The Royal assent was given, and on August 6, the last day of the Session, the Workmen's Compensation Act was placed on the Statute-book.

Let us do justice to it and to the ultimate effects of the "revolutionary principle".[2] The Act led to so much more litigation than

[1] Chamberlain never was above mentioning good journalism as an aid to statesmanship. In a memorandum for his colleagues (February 17, 1897) he remarked: "The Trades Unions have hitherto opposed the main proposal of the Bill, but their principal organ, the *Daily Chronicle*, has recently advocated it most strongly and I believe has made some impression on the Trades Union leaders".

[2] *Industrial Democracy*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, vol. i. (1897) pp. 387-388: " . . . the whole situation has been changed by the introduction and passage of Mr. Chamberlain's revolu-



THE "TRICKSY SPIRIT"!

Ferdinand . . . . L-RD S-L-SB-RY. *Ariel* . . . . RT. HON. J. CH-MB-RL-N

FERDINAND (*L-rd S-l-sb-ry*). "WHERE SHOULD THIS MUSIC BE? **** I HAVE FOLLOW'D IT, OR IT HATH DRAWN ME—RATHER."—*The Tempest*, Act 1., Sc. 2

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel which appeared in *Punch*, July 31, 1897
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its author anticipated that his jest about Asquith's "Lawyers' Employment Bill" was to be retorted on himself. Exaggeration on this score is usual, and may be found even in textbooks. One point is as usually overlooked. The number of cases brought into Court were far and away exceeded by the number of cases quietly settled out of Court and escaping attention. The way of the world gives little credit for any good thing not forced to its notice. But the irony of human wishes comes in.

Chamberlain had dreamed of making compensation almost automatic. The extent of litigation became a bitter drop in his cup. Caused partly by the habit of contention between capitalism and the Trades Unions, partly by legal ingenuity, the evil emphasised the truth of his original principle. Three years later the Unionist Government extended the Act to agricultural labourers, and in 1906 the Liberal Government brought in nearly all manual workers. Despite the imperfections and disappointments always incident to the introduction of a new system the statute of 1897 represented an immense advance by comparison with the former state of the law and with former conceptions of social justice in industrial life. The British example of replacing a mere right of action against employers by a regular charge on the trade was widely followed in the United States and throughout the British dominions.

V

Other episodes of Chamberlain's many-sided activity contrasted with his domestic legislation. In the settlement of the Venezuelan difficulty between Britain and the United States his part on both sides of the Atlantic was second to none.

Before the crisis Lord Salisbury seemed to exclude American intervention altogether and to disparage the Monroe doctrine itself. That position was untenable. To manœuvre without indignity towards safe ground was not easy. President Cleveland's plight was no better. For him the ignominy of precipitate retreat was impossible. He appointed his foreshadowed Commission—composed, happily, of wise men—whose nominal duty it was to determine the proper extent not only of a South

tionary 'Workmen's Compensation Bill'. The measure . . . seems in an almost dramatic manner to give the go-by to all the old controversies."

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American State but of a British colony. In one thing Chamberlain was unlike most British statesmen of that day. His acquaintance with America was direct. He knew how dangerous there, despite the number and staunchness of our friends, and despite more neutral forces of moderation, were the inflammable gases of anti-British feeling. He recognised that steady nerve at this pinch was as requisite as frank evidence of goodwill. As Secretary of State for the Colonies his duty, as well as his nature, made him the last man to sacrifice what was undoubted in the right of British Guiana, where the Venezuelan claim stretched to settled districts indisputably ours for a hundred years.

Documents too numerous for indication show that Chamberlain brought to the Anglo-American controversy a keener intelligence than any other member of the Cabinet. In the long line of our Foreign Ministers, Salisbury's portrait is one of the hardest to draw. When we study the negative resources of his statesmanship, its address in avoidance and its subtlety in persistence, his own lineaments sometimes seem to become fugitive and unseizable. When he abstained from rashness in retort and seemed amenable to pressure, he could be endlessly obdurate and adept in passive resistance, as the Germans, in their turn, were to find. Towards the United States he was inclined to this technique until the Cleveland ultimatum exploded. Chamberlain from the first glance brought surer discernment and more active contrivance to the matter.

VI

He was ceasing unfortunately to keep up his Diary. Some of its last entries reveal the agitations of British statesmen before a peaceful solution was assured.

January 9, 1896.—Sir Wm. Harcourt called late, and talked with me for two hours about the difficulty with the United States of America.

Harcourt was virtually for unlimited concession. The Cabinet must yield at once and remove all risk of war by accepting unrestricted arbitration. Otherwise Lord Salisbury's Government would meet the fate of Lord North's. The co-leader of the Opposition would feel bound to indict them, confident the people would be on his side. Chamberlain says:

I told him that if he spoke as he seemed inclined to do, he would be the greatest enemy of peace, for he would harden the hearts of the Americans against any reasonable compromise or argument which might be suggested to settle the matter without dishonour to either nation.

The Diary resumes:

January 11.—At the Cabinet Council I reported Harcourt's interview. Lord Salisbury said that if we were to yield unconditionally to American threats another Prime Minister would have to be found. It was quite clear that the great majority—if not all—the Cabinet would be glad of any honourable settlement; and accordingly, after referring to Lord S.'s statement that he would not object on principle to an arbitration limited to the territory on either side of the Schomburgk line at present unsettled, I asked if he would not be willing to submit the idea to Mr Bayard and sound him as to its possibilities. . . .

The Prime Minister thought it wiser that Chamberlain should not intervene directly, but agreed that he should open private communications with the American ambassador, Mr. Bayard, through some third party. He lost no time. The apt intermediary was found in Lyon Playfair. Then advanced in years and made a peer, he had long been known as a scientist of high repute and as a weighty member of the House of Commons. Like Chamberlain and Harcourt he had married an American wife, and his long annual visits through many years to her parents in New England had given him a rare knowledge of the United States.

January 12.—Called on Lord Playfair and asked him to see Bayard and sound him, and if he thought fit to make following suggestions in his (Lord P.'s) name. Everything would depend on whether Cleveland was as anxious to avoid war, if it could be done honourably, as we were: in this case he might:—

(1) Answer Lord Salisbury's despatch re Monroe Doctrine by calling a conference of European nations interested and proposing its adoption. The Monroe Doctrine is supposed to be that "no further extension of territory on the American Continent should be permitted to any European people". Cleveland might assure himself beforehand of the assent of England to this doctrine and the other nations would certainly follow suit.

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(2) When the Doctrine had been declared to be International Law, the question of its application to Venezuela, or any other particular case, would be rather for arbitration.

(3) Either as an alternative to above suggestion, or an addition to it, Cleveland might agree to press Venezuela to assent to a Boundary Commission to fix a boundary on the understanding that all lands on either side of the Schomburgk line[1] which were already settled or occupied either by Venezuela or Great Britain should be accepted as belonging to them respectively, and the new line would therefore be drawn in the unsettled territory. This might be done by a joint Commission—as in the Pamirs or on the Niger—or it might be left to arbitration.

(4) Lastly, if none of these suggestions—all proof of a desire to make an amicable and honourable arrangement—were acceptable to Cleveland, he might be asked to make other suggestions himself, always bearing in mind that they must be such as both countries could accept without loss of honour.

Lord Playfair at once undertook the mission, embodied the suggestions in a memorandum of his own, and the same day saw the American ambassador, with whom he was on terms of close friendship.[2] Mr. Bayard for his part was a man of distinguished tradition and nature, sometimes accused in his own country of being too partial to ours. Very soon the Colonial Secretary's name had to be brought into the discussion as a guarantee that the approaches from the British side were authoritative. The correspondence went on for weeks. Chamberlain's views were communicated by Playfair to Bayard; while Bayard's views and those of the American Government passed back through Playfair to Chamberlain and from him to Salisbury. The Prime Minister approved repeatedly his colleague's conciliatory yet manful conduct of this anxious affair.

President Cleveland for the sake of stiff form felt bound, as we saw, to insist upon appointing his commission to pronounce on our interests over our heads. But this extraordinary procedure turned out humorously to be a jewel in a black box. British temperament refused to feel insulted. The American Commis-

[1] Drawn in 1841-42. Chamberlain indicates here the main British claim, subsequently substantiated with only slight alteration by the Paris Award of 1899.

[2] *Memoirs of Lyon Playfair*, edited by Wemyss Reid, pp. 416-426.

sioners were able and judicious men and they meant to work for sanity. Nominally an arbitrary rather than an arbitral body, one of their first steps was a courteous request for British assistance. And a mass of British blue-books and other documentary evidence was as courteously supplied. But from *détente* to *entente* proved a far cry.

Towards the end of February 1896, the Colonial Secretary, with the Prime Minister's full approval, thought it wiser to drop the informal negotiations through Lord Playfair.

While feeling improved the deadlock of ideas persisted for six months more. Then Chamberlain resolved to make a bigger effort and to cross the Atlantic for the purpose as soon as the session closed. He had contemplated a visit to South Africa in the autumn, and it is a pity that this man and President Kruger never saw each other. But Anglo-American relations came first. Lord Salisbury in the latter part of August blessed the attempt and engaged to take no further step until he received his colleague's news from the United States.[1] "What should you think", wrote Mrs. Chamberlain to Massachusetts, "if about September 2nd, Joe and I should walk in on you at the Farm?"[2]

An accidental acquaintance formerly made in America now seemed providential. We remember how the Colonial Secretary by a lucky chance when in the train for New York three years before had been "introduced to a gentleman who turned out to be Mr. Olney", then only Attorney-General in the Cleveland administration. Now both had become Secretaries of State. They arranged to meet unofficially in Boston.

The first interview as reported at once to Lord Salisbury was not too promising.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

The Farm, Danvers, Mass.—September 9, 1896.—I had a long private interview yesterday with Mr. Olney. Its tone was perfectly courteous, but in regard to the subject Mr. Olney was dogmatic and almost aggressive. He abandoned all pretence of impartiality, and I gathered that while repudiating the extreme pretensions of Venezuela he considered that our claim to the Schomburgk line was equally extreme. . . . I

[1] Salisbury to Chamberlain, August 23, 1896.
[2] August 14, 1896.

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heard yesterday from Lord Gough of the kindly intentions of the Clan-na-Gael but I hope they will be disappointed. Unfortunately, this house is isolated and altogether unprotected but Olney has sent a couple of men to watch. . . .

Chamberlain, little given to soft words in sharp encounters, schooled himself this time to imperturbable persuasiveness. In talk and writing he explained with scrupulous civility why the settled districts of British Guiana within the Schomburgk line could not be exposed to jeopardy by Her Majesty's Government, though unconditional arbitration would be accepted for all the unsettled area claimed by Venezuela.

The second meeting a week later was much more encouraging.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

The Farm, Danvers, Mass.—September 17, 1896.—I had another interview by appointment with Mr. Olney on Wednesday last, Sept. 16, and found a very marked change in his tone. He was now frankly cordial and there was no trace of the aggressive demeanour which he exhibited on the last occasion.

The American Secretary of State agreed that all Guiana territory shown to have been continuously occupied by our people for a long time should be recognised as indisputably British and exempt from arbitration.

Chamberlain came home and reported. The Prime Minister expressly instructed Sir Julian Pauncefote in Washington to continue discussion on the Colonial Secretary's lines.[1] He had contended that thirty years' settlement should constitute security. With little further demur Washington accepted fifty years. That compromise at last was to the credit of all concerned, Cleveland and Olney as well as Salisbury and Chamberlain. May this good example stand always for good augury in the English-speaking world.

At the next Guildhall banquet[2] the Prime Minister was able to announce in effect that the Venezuelan dispute was composed on terms honourable to both the kindred nations. To Salisbury's wisdom and fortitude when awakened to the gravity of the

[1] Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, October 16, 1896.
[2] November 9, 1896.

quarrel full praise belongs. But from beginning to end Chamberlain played the vigorous part. He, after all, was the Minister who crossed the Atlantic and obtained in personal meetings with Secretary Olney the recognition of the saving principle. The value of his effort, almost unknown to public opinion then and since, was fully recognised by some of the initiated. Harcourt had been much too precipitate and submissive at the outset. Now he was both generous and amusing and received a gay reply:

CHAMBERLAIN AND HARCOURT

November 17, 1896.—*Harcourt to Chamberlain.*—I am glad to hear from those who have seen you that you have returned from the United States in a high state of preservation. . . . I congratulate you on the satisfactory conclusion of the Venezuelan business. . . . As you know I have been too anxious for a settlement to carp at the methods by which it has been reached. I know from my American informants how much you personally contributed to the satisfactory solution. . . .

November 19.—*Chamberlain to Harcourt.*—For myself I live in a serene atmosphere of Colonies and Commerce far removed from party controversy, although I take a certain interest in the political misfortunes both of my opponents, and my friends. But what are the Bishops to me? I have only one bishop and I have just disestablished him.

The only Education Question that really interests me is that of the Uitlanders, to whom Kruger insists on teaching Dutch! . . .

I am sincerely glad that the American question is happily settled. . . .

The final understanding was embodied in the Treaty of Washington of February 2, 1897. A tribunal of five jurists was constituted. Two represented Britain, two the United States, and the neutral President was the great Russian jurist, M. Martens. The Court sat in Paris. The award was declared on October 3, 1899. It rejected absolutely the extreme Venezuelan claim. Except for a corner or two the old Schomburgk boundary was confirmed. British Guiana proper remained intact. For that colony Chamberlain had fought hard.

VII

There is a singular epilogue. While in the United States Chamberlain with his irrepressible initiative exceeded the strict terms

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of his diplomatic mission. He returned to his idea of Anglo-American action for enforcing humanity on the Sultan of Turkey, and he drew remarkable expressions from President Cleveland's Secretary of State.

To understand this episode, we must forget the conditions of our own time and enter into the emotions of forty years ago. The Armenian atrocities had raged for two years. Official reports were things to shudder at no less than the journalistic descriptions. In Britain the revolt of feeling was of a fervour hard to conceive in our day. Half the Unionists were at one with nearly all Liberals in their desire to find some means of staying or breaking the murderous arm of Sultan Abdul Hamid. In the United States what used to be called the "New England conscience" was still a power and deeply stirred. On this subject at least the Colonial Secretary was still a Gladstonian Liberal—as in truth was Lord Salisbury himself.

As it happened, just at the time of his visit to Massachusetts there was a recrudescence of horrors. Some desperate Armenians with bombs and revolvers seized the Ottoman bank at Galata, and gave the Sultan his pretext. A Turkish St. Bartholomew as it was called—but that name is weak to describe the fact—broke out in Constantinople. Organised massacre raged in the streets under the eyes of the ambassadors. Chamberlain did not hear of this carnival of blood until he reached New York. During the latter part of his stay at Danvers he read in the Boston newspapers the accounts of more butcheries in Asia Minor.

When he and Olney had come to their agreement in principle upon the Venezuelan question, Chamberlain ventured to go further. Asking earnestly whether co-operation between England and America might not be possible to stop the Armenian massacres, he was astonished and rejoiced by the response. Olney with impassioned sincerity wrote an extraordinary letter. He had been no enemy of England when he raised the Venezuelan crisis. He had moved on what he thought just grounds when all former representations from Washington to London had been treated by the British Foreign Office with "seeming if not intentional contumely". There could be no entangling alliance with any European nation. But—and it

was a great but—there might be a common cause with England after all.

OLNEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

September 28, 1896.— . . . Because of our inborn and instinctive English sympathies, proclivities, modes of thought and standards of right and wrong, nothing would more gratify the mass of the American people than to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with England in support of a great cause—in a necessary struggle for the defence of human rights and the advancement of Christian civilisation. That a great cause of this sort is now presented by unhappy Armenia I cannot doubt. . . .

If therefore England should now seriously set about putting the Armenian charnel-house in order there can be little doubt that the United States would consider the moment opportune for vigorous exertion on behalf of American citizens and interests in Turkey. It would feel itself entitled to demand full indemnity for past injuries to them as well as adequate security against the like injuries in the future. It would support such demands by all the physical force at its disposal—with the necessary result, I think, that its attitude would both morally and materially strengthen the hands of England. . . .

There is a prophetic soul in the first part of this letter, though it foreshadows dimly things that were only to be realised in the World War, more than twenty years after. The American Secretary of State writes under strong emotion. Just before, Gladstone, indomitable at eighty-seven, raised his voice in the old way: "Had I the years of 1876 upon me gladly would I start another campaign even if as long as that".[1] His heroic touch at that age thrilled America, where he was revered. Warmly the Colonial Secretary responded.

CHAMBERLAIN TO OLNEY

September 29, 1896.— . . . I can assure you with the most absolute sincerity that at the present time in Great Britain there is no one from the highest in the land to the poorest workman who does not desire the cordial friendship and respect of the United States more than the good-will of any other nation in the world and who does not regard with horror the idea of a fratricidal conflict between the two branches of the

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 522.

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> Anglo-Saxon race. . . . I will only add that I am deeply sensible of the importance of such moral and incidental co-operation in the cause of humanity as is pointed out in your letter, and that I believe that it would profoundly affect the relations between the two countries, and would evoke that sympathy, which, even if latent, must and ought to exist between peoples with common origins, common literature, common laws and common standards of right and wrong. . . .

All this illustrates the power of personal contact between statesmen in international diplomacy. Two talks at Boston had done more than a year of dispatches between Washington and London. In advance Chamberlain and Olney supposed each other to be hard men. They met to find that each possessed, like the mass of both nations they represented, a full share of human sentiment. The exchanges just related reveal another side of Chamberlain's mind. On the Eastern Question, which would be one main cause of a World War some day, they had, alas, no effect. The Cleveland administration was soon crushed in the presidential contest. Under the M'Kinley regime America was engrossed by high tariffs, the Cuban chaos, and the Spanish War. It was a new era of economic and political expansion. European attention and British policy henceforth were absorbed almost continuously by other crises and cares. The Armenian question, we may say, was wiped off the diplomatic map like pencil-marks by india-rubber. The British fleet could not sail like the ark to Ararat.

Chamberlain was convinced to the day of his death that English-speaking solidarity would come some day; and his abhorrence of Turkish misrule since his Radical years was unchanged. When the Cretan insurrection broke out in the spring following his American visit he was the same fervent phil-Hellene he had been for twenty years.

VIII

In the Unionist Cabinet he had already taken his specific share of responsibility for a far-reaching decision regarding Egypt and the Nile. That the Sudan handed back to barbarism must some day be reconquered was a general assumption amongst Unionists and Liberal Imperialists of Lord Rosebery's school.

But no attempt in that sense was planned until Ministers found their hands forced by catastrophe to the Italian army in Abyssinia. Ten years had passed since Gordon's death. His memory was still a living influence on Unionist imagination. His finger still pointed to Khartum. The French expedition under Marchand was on its way to the upper reaches of the Nile. The Liberal Government had sounded its warning against an "unfriendly act".

But another event forced British action. On the 1st of March 1896, General Baratieri's army of 30,000 men was overwhelmed at Adowa. At this the dervishes swarmed round Kassala, and imperilled the gallant Italian garrison of one of Gordon's old outposts still untaken. The new Government in Rome instructed its Ambassador in London to urge that the Egyptian army should make a diversion. For reasons of general policy as well as of traditional friendship with Italy, no strong British Government could resist this appeal. Yet the method and measure of intervention required searching thought. Within a few days the Cabinet had to make up its mind. At the moment Lord Cromer at Cairo disapproved a forward policy. The Colonial Secretary favoured it on guarded terms. He was no fire-eater at a Jingo fair. Remembering the bitter experience of Gladstone's second Government, and acting on Arthur Balfour's behalf as well as his own, he asked the Prime Minister for an assurance that the military gentlemen in Egypt, and especially their confident Sirdar, should be firmly controlled. None of them yet knew their Kitchener—neither his methodical caution nor his long-sighted ambition, neither the kind nor degree of his ability.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

March 11, 1896.—I have been talking to Balfour about the Soudan expedition and he has asked me to write to you the result of our conversation.

We both understand that your policy and the policy of the Cabinet is to advance as far —and no farther—than we can do at the present time without any undue effort on the part of Egypt. It may be that when we get to Dongola we may find the tribes friendly—disgusted with the tyranny of the Khalifa and ready to welcome our advances. If so we may very properly go farther to Khartoum and gradually restore

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the Soudan to civilisation. But if, on the contrary, we find that the Khalifa is still supported by his fanatical followers, and that he is capable of a very serious resistance, involving immense efforts, both military and financial, on the part of Egypt, and carrying with it grave responsibilities for this country, then we must stay our advance, making good the position acquired and waiting till the pear is ripe.

This policy seems to be prudent and easily defensible—but there is a possibility that our hands may be forced by the military men in Egypt. If they go too far, and meet with a reverse, we should have to come to the rescue with a British army and I suppose that, besides other consequences, the Government would be deserted by its own followers.

To prevent this it seems desirable, if you agree, to send the most stringent orders to Egypt that, having regard to the high political interests concerned, the leaders of the expedition must not be rash, and must strictly avoid any movement which can by any possibility entail a reverse, or such serious fighting as would strain the resources of Egypt. It is better to advance slowly and sure, and we cannot afford to take any risk. Of course, as long as we carry the railway with us I suppose we are pretty safe, but I share your evident fear of *trop de zèle* on the part of Kitchener.

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

March 12.—I received your letter last night with great satisfaction, for I had been an hour before discoursing to Lansdowne in the same sense. . . .

We have counsellors who press us, and will press us towards two opposite extremes, which must be equally avoided. One set of counsellors will urge us to be satisfied with a demonstration and then to go back again. We shall lose seriously in credit if we do this: and we shall miss a good opportunity.

The other extreme is what Kitchener and his friends will urge on us—to press forward without regard to the security of our supplies, or to our power of paying our way as we go along. This extreme is worse than the other: for it may lead to disaster as well as discredit. I earnestly pressed on Lansdowne that he must be prepared to sit heavily on Kitchener and on his own military advisers. He is so fully sensible of the danger that he leans rather in the other direction, and wishes to

return after a demonstration in order that he may not expose Kitchener to temptation.

On these competent terms strategy by stages was ordained. Censors of that day who attributed to the Government, and especially to the Colonial Secretary, a policy of wild adventure were wildly misinformed. Ministers resolved to aid Italy, and in effect to extend the British Empire by a circumspect steadiness almost Roman in its character. The Cabinet decision, taken a week or so after the Italian request, was announced in Parliament. Instantly the Radicals of the Opposition moved the adjournment of the House of Commons. This march into the desert reminded them once more of the madness of Cambyses and they breathed dire prediction.

The policy ordered exactly suited Kitchener's own book. The Cabinet was lucky in its Sirdar. He had unique opportunity to take his time, and this, with his railway plan and his machine guns, was to stultify Opposition alarms derived from perils and tragedies more than ten years before.

Satisfied for his part about the gradual method of the military enterprise, Chamberlain threw himself into the defence and praise of Ministerial policy. That task brought him, both in the House and on the platform, into renewed raspings with John Morley. The blunder of Harcourt's section of the Liberal Opposition was to stake themselves on prophecy before the event. This error happily is as dangerous in the dismal as in the sanguine sense. Four days after the announcement of the new policy on the Nile, Morley moved a vote of censure. His indictment was accomplished in the letter but did not strengthen either himself or his party. He spoke as though Kitchener's troops were about to perish in a wilderness deadly as

> . . . that Serbonian bog
> Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old
> Where armies whole have sunk.

To the Colonial Secretary was entrusted the case for the Government. He brought back the House to cool judgment. Far from making us more unpopular in the world, our action in support of Italy was not only appreciated in that country—where the Marquis di Rudini had hailed it as a proof of "affectionate

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friendship"—but was warmly approved both by Germany and Austria. The advance would be strictly limited by two conditions: by the security of our communications and the extent of resistance. This was the core of common sense. Harcourt described conditional advance as a policy of drift, but it was just the opposite. It was a policy both definite and controlled in accordance with Chamberlain's stipulations from the outset and the Prime Minister's views.

Stage by stage, Kitchener's progress while the railway extended was a clockwork reconquest. By September Dongola was occupied, and one province of the Sudan had been recovered in a few months. Debarred from going farther at present, the Sirdar was allowed to advance next year, the Queen's Year, with the same precision to Berber. Doubt as to Sudanese policy was now over. It was supported with uncommon enthusiasm by the large majority of the nation. The next objective was Khartum, but that tale belongs to later pages.

Like the rest of the Government, and not less than the Prime Minister himself, the Colonial Secretary recognised that this signal undertaking had its shadow-side. Unfortunate and too likely to be sinister was the aggravation of all our virulent difficulties with France. The two nations were on roads that might meet on the Upper Nile. The Unionist Cabinet was already resolved that our claim to the river up to the equatorial lakes must be maintained in its fulness at any cost. Chamberlain was accustomed to face consequences. As early as the end of 1896 we find him pressing on the Prime Minister that the Defence Committee of the Cabinet should consider in time the position which might arise "if we continue to hold Egypt in spite of France or of France and Russia united". [1] In his own administrative sphere a stern encounter would have to be confronted on the Niger before the worst crisis could arise on the Nile.

[1] Chamberlain to Salisbury, December 11, 1896.

CHAPTER LIV

"THE GREAT DREAM" AND THE QUEEN'S YEAR

(1897)

CONTRASTS and Humours of Colonial Administration—Flogging and Slavery—Communications and Closer Intercourse—Ways and Means—The Suez Canal Shares as a Development Fund—Colonial Office *v.* Treasury—A Fine Plan Defeated—"The Great Dream"—A First Campaign for Imperial Unity—The Zollverein Plan and "Free Trade within the Empire"—The Colonies adhere to Protection and Preference—Canada Leads the Way—All Overseas Premiers Invited to the Jubilee—More Light on the Colonial Conference of 1897—Closer Unity Postponed—Chamberlain Bides his Time—Spirit and Scenes of the Queen's Summer—Chamberlain's Power at its Height—"Patriotism" and Foreign Caricature—Shadows of World Policy.

I

THE next theme compels vivid attention. We move with his administration through that first period which reached a climax when he brought all the Colonial Premiers to England for the Greater Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

He has to deal, for instance, with the civil affairs of Gibraltar, and to consider a cable to span the Pacific. His responsibilities circle the globe, and the great Rock is only two miles square, but no soldier could be a more jealous guardian of its interests than this civilian Minister. When there is a typical squabble at Gibraltar, always harassed by Spanish tariffs, he uses Palmerstonian language in the Department. "I am (as usual) for extreme measures. I would like to say to Spain, if you do not open the Custom House in a week we will abolish all our anti-smuggling restrictions and we will not bother about the importation of arms into Cuba." He does not put this tone into dispatches but he expedites a good settlement.

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At the other end of the Mediterranean there is Cyprus. To that historic island, rich but unimaginative Britain has been, so far, "a stony-hearted stepmother". The Cypriots plead both for financial relief and for expenditure to foster their resources and modernise their communications. They look to this Colonial Minister for something to be done at last.[1] And done something is, while Disraeli's shade approves. Chamberlain wrings an increased grant from a reluctant Treasury—nearly always his opponent—and fosters this neglected estate, like many another.

He was engaged on improving communications, local and oceanic. He began to enter upon those personal and departmental enquiries which led to the new schools of tropical medicine. As he jested to Harcourt, he had disestablished a bishop; later he had perforce to concern himself with a single public-house at St. Helena. Notably he constituted the West Indian Commission for the economic rescue of those famous but stricken islands, and was happy to secure Sir Edward Grey as a member.

II

Another side of him shows his combustible human feeling, as in the Armenian misery, against every kind of cruelty and injustice. He is not distracted by the pomps of Imperialism when slavery, flogging or pernicious liquor traffics are in question.

There was Zanzibar. When British cruisers suppressed the slave trade along the East African coast, he was insistent in the Cabinet on the abolition in that island of domestic slavery under British auspices; and he opposed compensation to the owners.[2] A decree in the spring of 1897 abolished the legal status of slavery, and it died out, though his view against compensation did not prevail.

He set his face against the liquor traffic in tropical colonies. Almost an obsession still was his old hatred of flogging, and he rejoiced in his power to strike at it. He sent out a rousing circular to all the Crown Colonies. In these generally the lash was more freely wielded than in Great Britain, and impunity was abused.

[1] Deputation of traders interested in Cyprus received at the Colonial Office. Chamberlain's Speech, January 21, 1897.

[2] Zanzibar was not handed over to the Colonial Office until after Chamberlain's time.

Especially is this the case when, as is inevitable in the tropical Colonies, the offenders are for the most part of a different race and colour from those who are placed in a position to control and to punish them. Among the latter there will, in the ordinary course of probabilities, be now and again men of rough fibre; and at out-stations, sometimes even at head-quarters, there are not the checks and safeguards against abuses which exist in more highly developed countries. The punishment gives little trouble. It is swift and severe, it bears a kind of testimony to the personal power and superiority of the official who awards it, and the more often it is inflicted the more ready to disregard the pain and suffering which it involves become the men who deal in this species of punishment.[1]

So he enjoined upon the Governors that it was their bounden duty to restrain the use of the lash, and to make an annual report on the subject. If he insisted on the rights of Imperialism, he never forgot its duties.

His practical imagination was bent on developing the communications of the Empire, and he saw them as a whole. A fast steamship service across the Atlantic to Canada was one means; another the all-British cable from Canada to Australia, an enterprise advocated and obstructed for years. Kitchener was pushing railways and telegraphs far southwards from Cairo, as Rhodes was pushing them far northwards from the Cape. The line to Uganda from the Indian Ocean to the equatorial lakes was now advancing. It was not under his department, but from the first he championed its construction. Imperialists supposed it would become a branch of the Cape-to-Cairo system. A complete trans-African railway under British auspices might compare with the trans-Asiatic line which the Tsar's engineers at that time were carrying through Siberia. We are apt to forget in our age how strongly the new Imperial movement had been influenced by the building of the Canadian Pacific line. Chamberlain went forward with his own railways, as he fondly regarded them, in West Africa. He had no more lively conviction than that the penetration of all tropical Africa by railways would be the surest means of extinguishing slavery.

Another sort of conception was brilliant though abortive. The Colonial Secretary might speak of developing the "neglected

[1] Circular dated Downing Street, May 25, 1897.

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estates" of the Empire and might win popular applause for that policy. But how under the British Treasury system could he find the money?

He hit upon a plan daring enough in its originality but one of the ablest of all his unfulfilled ideas. Could it have been carried out it would have made him not only figuratively but directly Lord Beaconsfield's political executor. As it happened, on the 1st July, 1895, a few days after the Unionist Government took office, the United Kingdom entered upon the full possession of the Suez Canal shares free of further cost. Chamberlain drew up a memorandum for the Cabinet. To edify his Conservative colleagues he summarised the fabulous results of their prophet's operation. The net expense of the acquisition, he pointed out, had proved to be not much more than £2,000,000. The market value of the property was now estimated at nearly £24,000,000 —more than eleven times the price of purchase. The nation's annual income from the shares had risen to £670,000.

What was to be the sequel of what he called Beaconsfield's "unique stroke of genius"? It seemed to be tamely assumed that "the income of this vast property" would be henceforth included amongst the items of "Miscellaneous Receipts", and dissipated annually like the rest. The Colonial Secretary protested against that dull conclusion. The Suez proceeds should be earmarked "for objects as great and important as the policy that originally dictated the acquisition of the shares".

He proposed to carry the Suez property and revenue to separate account and use it to guarantee his contemplated loans for construction and development. Resources so obtained "should be lent or invested in the Crown Colonies and dependencies of the Empire for public works, such as railways, bridges, harbours and irrigation". One passage of the memorandum must be quoted for its "sagacious audacity", to recall the old Birmingham word:

> It is certain that in many cases progress has been delayed, and in some cases absolutely stayed, because the only methods by which improvement could be carried out were beyond the scope of private resources. . . . In Dominica, in British Honduras, and in British Guiana for instance, there are untold possibilities of natural wealth in the shape of gold and other minerals, dye woods and timber, and all tropical

productions, which neither the Colonies themselves nor individual adventurers are in a position to open up. Crown estates of immense extent and undoubted intrinsic value are waiting a purchaser because there are no proper means of access. Individual enterprise will till the fields and cut the timber, and work the mines; but Government and Government alone can make the roads and the railways. This is the true province of Government in new countries, and until it is recognised by Great Britain she will not have fulfilled her obligations to the dependencies which she holds under her rule.[1]

It was in vain. For success in an attempt of this boldness he would have had to be Prime Minister like Disraeli himself. "Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour", he notes, "were very favourable to the scheme", though they thought that home purposes as well as colonial might well be served by it. At first the Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed not to look askance, but at length killed it in the Cabinet by declaring that if it were adopted he would have to impose fresh taxation to replace his income from the Suez shares.[2] This the Colonial Secretary always thought a very bad day's work. Salisbury lamented later in another connection, that "The influence which the Gladstonian garrison of the Treasury have upon Beach's mind is very disastrous."[3] The Colonial Secretary could not spend an extra £5 note, as once he grimly jested, without applying to the Treasury. He was to find it the toughest of all his antagonists to the very end of his career, and the hostility of the "Gladstonian garrison" would be worst at the last.

III

All these and other endeavours were subsidiary to what he liked to call the great dream.

Singular to say, the history of the movement for closer Imperial Union has never been completely written, and no adequate summary is possible in these pages. The vision never died either overseas or at home. If it seemed well-nigh extinct in the 'sixties of last century it began to revive in the

[1] Colonial Office, November 25, 1895. Circulated to the Cabinet, January 8, 1896.

[2] Chamberlain Papers, March 3, 1896.

[3] Salisbury to Chamberlain, December 13, 1896.

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'seventies. The old Imperial Federation League, founded in London in July 1884, derived as much from Liberal as from Conservative feeling. The League spread a respectful though vague sense of the greatness of the subject, but languished and expired because of its inability to recommend a plan. Before its demise there was a more active spirit in the air. At the first Colonial Conference in 1887—at the time of Queen Victoria's first Jubilee—the chief proposal was that of Hofmeyr, the Afrikander delegate, for a general levy of a small duty, 2 per cent, on foreign goods, the proceeds to be devoted to the Navy. This in its way raised the preferential principle. The same principle was emphasised in 1894 when the Ottawa Conference by a decided majority adopted the following resolution:

> That this Conference records its belief in the advisability of a Customs arrangement between Great Britain and the Colonies by which trade within the Empire may be placed on a more favourable footing than that which is carried on with foreign countries.[1]

So the position stood when Chamberlain took office in the summer of 1895 and placed the cause of closer union foremost.

His earlier appeals were made to imagination, sentiment and to the spirit of practical enterprise. Liberals suspected him of nothing worse than an intention and capacity to "run the Empire on business lines", as they said; and this was a proposition commendable to all parties.

Then came the succession of amazements within a few weeks —the Cleveland manifesto, the Jameson Raid, above all, the Kaiser's telegram to Kruger. The Empire instinctively felt a suggestion of menace that might one day become graver than any since the Napoleonic wars. All the colonies made common cause with the mother country. In the Colonial Minister's mind, as in that of many other men in those awakening weeks, the question of "closer union" took an aspect both more urgent and more hopeful. Was not a providential moment presented to the Empire? Was the creative opportunity to pass unused? He conceived that the only promising means of promoting closer commercial union was to start yet another of his unauthorised

[1] Richard Jebb, *The Imperial Conference*, vol. i. p. 188. This work remains an invaluable contribution to the subject.

programmes. Mutual preference to the small degree hitherto proposed was not enough. He resolved to advocate nothing less than "free trade within the Empire"—an Imperial Zollverein.

IV

The new note Chamberlain struck with resounding boldness in the spring of 1896. The speech at the Canada Club, like some following speeches at this period, is not only of historical interest but reads to-day like a passage of autobiography:

The recent isolation of the United Kingdom, the dangers which seemed to threaten us, have evoked from all our colonies, and especially from Canada, an outburst of loyalty and affection which has reverberated throughout the world.... The shadow of war *did* darken the horizon.... I ask you now, gentlemen, is this demonstration, this almost universal expression of loyalty from all our Colonies, to pass away without a serious effort upon the part both of colonial and Imperial statesmen to transform these sentiments into practical results? I have, at any rate, thought it was my duty, the first time I had the opportunity of speaking, at least to call attention to the position of this great question, which has now been before us for a good number of years, which has appealed strongly to the sentiments of the people, but which has not up to the present time resulted in anything like a practical scheme....

But it does not follow that on that account we must give up our aspirations.... It is only a proof that we must approach the goal in a different way....

> A great design is seldom snatch't at once;
> 'Tis patience heaves it on.

Then he entered upon his analysis of alternatives. The candour of his thinking aloud riveted his hearers.

We may endeavour to establish common interests and common obligations.... What is the greatest of our common obligations? It is Imperial defence. What is the greatest of our common interests? It is Imperial trade. And those two are very closely connected. It is very difficult to see how you can pretend to deal with its great question of Imperial defence without having first dealt with the question of Imperial trade.... If the people of this country and the people of the Colonies

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. . . intend to approach this question in a practical spirit they must approach it on its commercial side.

Chamberlain declared that in the abstract he was a convinced free trader, believing that the world would become most prosperous on that principle universally applied; but "I have not such a pedantic admiration for it that, if sufficient advantage were offered to me, I would not consider a deviation from the strict doctrine." No such advantage was yet held out by the Colonies—not even in the shape of substantial preference for British goods. Yet the United Kingdom was asked to put duties on imported food and on raw material as well. That course would mean dearer living for the British working-classes, and increased costs of production—hampering our competition in neutral markets and prejudicing generally our foreign trade, still "so gigantic in proportion".

Hence the flat impossibility of progress by any schemes of petty preference. What then? Was it not time to consider in earnest a grander conception? He had already shown how the old Zollverein between the separate German States had played its part in creating German political unity. That example, he agreed, could only be followed with profound modifications to suit vastly different circumstances, but the essential principle held good. A world-wide British Zollverein with free trade between all its parts and duties on foreign products seemed the one policy great enough to justify the mother country in abrogating the unconditional principle of "free imports".

My . . . proposition is that a true Zollverein for the Empire, that a free trade established throughout the Empire, although it would involve the imposition of duties against foreign countries, and would be in that respect a derogation from the high principles of free trade, and from the practice of the United Kingdom up to the present time, would still be a proper subject for discussion and might possibly lead to a satisfactory arrangement if the colonies on their part were willing to consider it . . . it would undoubtedly lead to the earliest possible development of their great natural resources, would bring to them population, would open to them the enormous market of the United Kingdom. . . .

Then he summed up. To leave no doubt he uttered the drastic

word that within the Empire "protection must disappear". Were the Zollverein realised then indeed a Council of the Empire might be constituted.

> I speak on this occasion for myself only. I want, not to lay down a course of policy which must be followed, but I want to provoke discussion. . . . To organise an Empire—one may almost say to create an Empire—greater and more potent for peace and the civilisation of the world than any that history has ever known—that is a dream if you like, but a dream of which no man need be ashamed.[1]

His wife recorded that he was well pleased with this speech and its reception. "He has had this in his mind for years, and now the opportunity has come to see whether it is possible to do anything to promote his ideas."[2] Note well two things. In the vision of Empire free trade, leading to some kind of regular association for defence and policy, he might be called a transcendent idealist. But he was too competent and plain-thinking to be a rigid *idéologue*. He did not forget that direct taxation overseas to the same extent as at home was impracticable. The Colonies must keep a wide latitude to raise revenue from Customs duties. If, with that common-sensible and manageable exception, a full Imperial Zollverein and free trade under the flag with counter-duties against foreign tariffs were supported by the self-governing colonies—while India's system at that time presented no such impediment as to-day—then, indeed, the thing might be done.

In phrasing the Canada Club speech did not rank with his highest, but its imaginative reach and audacious heresy made an uncommon stir. At least in his desire to "provoke discussion" he was universally successful. At home many Unionists called it epoch-marking. Others thought it Utopian. The Colonies were more cooled than encouraged by the drastic proposition that if a privileged market for their resources were to be established in the mother country, then, on their side Protection proper must disappear.

On the whole they could not think of it. Even then their tariffs already had struck too deep a root and were of too tough

[1] Canada Club, March 25, 1896.
[2] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, March 27, 1896.

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a growth. This fact and others were too strong for him. Once again, indeed, he came back to the theme. In June 1896 the "Chambers of Commerce of the Empire" held their third Congress in London. Delegates attended from all parts of the Empire. In animated debates the Canadian representatives attacked the insular interpretation of free trade, while most British representatives retorted that for the United Kingdom tariffs were taboo. The Colonial Secretary delivered the principal address. He insisted that every other subject on the agenda shrank into insignificance by comparison with commercial union. Were that achieved an Imperial Council and common arrangements for defence would come of themselves. He repeated his conviction that Empire free trade was the only policy in sight that could lead the cause of Imperial Federation to full success:

> That is the principle of the German Zollverein, that is the principle which underlies the Federation of the United States of America; and I do not doubt for a moment that if it were adopted it would be the strongest bond of union between the British race throughout the world. I say that such a proposal as that might commend itself to an orthodox free trader. It would be the greatest advance that free trade has ever made since it was first advocated by Mr. Cobden, to extend its doctrine permanently to more than 300,000,000 of the human race, and to communities many of which are amongst the most thriving, amongst the most prosperous, and the most rapidly increasing in the world; and on the other hand it would open up to the colonies an almost unlimited market for their agriculture and other productions.[1]

It was an unconscious valediction. For reasons soon to appear, the vision of a world-wide British Zollverein based on free trade within the Empire had to vanish from his plans, though for some years he not only held to the principle as an ideal but saw no practicable alternative.

V

Before the beginning of 1897 the Unionist Ministers had to turn their minds to the approaching duty which became all-engrossing—how to provide for the fitting commemoration of the sixtieth year of Queen Victoria's fortunate and even mar-

[1] London, June 9, 1896.

vellous reign. An anniversary of a character so rare in all history was to be celebrated by national thanksgiving and rejoicing beyond former example. But at first there was no conscious project of making it what it became, an overpowering demonstration of Imperial feeling.

The Colonial Secretary at first doubted, and the Prime Minister agreed with him, whether there existed any sufficient basis for another Colonial Conference that year. The attempt might put back the purpose.

Above all, there was still some uncertainty about one thing which might be decisive one way or the other.

In Chamberlain's mind, then as after, Canada, already confederated, was the key of the whole question. His personal knowledge of that country had possessed him with the impression of another United States in the making. However small so far in population, the northern Dominion was as spacious as its southward neighbour and one day he thought must become as great. But Canada lately had swept out the Conservative party, broken within itself since the loss of Macdonald's genius. The Liberals were settled in power under the silver-voiced Laurier—a French Premier at the head of a party generally identified in the mother country with a policy of commercial union not with Great Britain but with the American Republic. Nay, a policy involving discrimination against Great Britain.

The Colonial Secretary's personal contact with a representative of the new Liberal regime at Ottawa had been anything but reassuring. When in Massachusetts, negotiating with Richard Olney on Venezuela in the preceding autumn of 1896, he had a disturbing interview with Sir Richard Cartwright, the Minister for Trade and Commerce in the Laurier Government. Cartwright frankly referred to the portentous possibility that the Dominion might throw in its commercial lot with the United States. Chamberlain records the dialogue.

THE FUTURE OF BRITAIN AND CANADA

(September 25, 1896)

CARTWRIGHT: "Mr. Laurier is very anxious to know your views before finally deciding his policy. . . . The most serious question is the relations

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between the Dominion and the United States. Two millions of persons have left Canada to go to the United States. Under existing circumstances this drain of the population must continue. It can only be stopped by better trade relations with our great neighbour. The Government desires to enter into communications for a reciprocity treaty. Unfortunately, the United States Government refuses to treat except on the basis of preferential rights. Mr. Laurier wishes to know whether the British Government would take objection to communications on this basis."

CHAMBERLAIN: "Of course, if the Canadian Government proposed to reduce their tariff generally, or at least to allow the mother country to share in any reductions which they might make to the United States, there would be nothing but satisfaction on the part of the British Government and people. But if on the contrary the Canadian Government proposes to put the mother country at a distinct disadvantage, I think that very strong feeling would be excited on the subject. It would be felt that the act was a hostile one, incompatible with the sentiments of Imperial unity which we believe both countries desire to cherish. It seems to me to be a step, and a great one, towards political separation, and you cannot expect any assistance from the mother country to such a policy."

CARTWRIGHT: "Would the British Government oppose the opening of negotiations with the United States?"

CHAMBERLAIN: "If the negotiations are opened without a foregone conclusion, I do not personally think that we shall have any right to object. But I think it best, frankly, to state my own view of the result so far as British feeling is concerned, if the negotiations are to end in such an arrangement as you shadow forth."[1]

But the Colonial Secretary added something else, and it was an efficient argument. On terms so doubtful he could not proceed with his plans to subsidise a fast steamship service to Canada, or, he implied, with any proposal committing the mother country to expense which, so far from bringing a return, would indirectly strengthen the forces of discrimination against herself. The Laurier Government held its hand.

[1] Chamberlain's memorandum written immediately after the conversation with Sir Richard Cartwright at Danvers, Mass., Friday September 25, 1896.

VI

This was why at the beginning of the Queen's Year there seemed no safe basis for another Colonial Conference. But it was not in Chamberlain's nature to hang on any doubt. He resolved upon a great appeal to imagination.

Parliament met at an unusually early date. At the end of January he informed a glad House of Commons that he had invited the Premiers of all the self-governing Colonies to come to England in June for the Queen's festival.[1] And they were asked on what we may call Disraelian terms. They were to be State-guests with Royal carriages at their disposal. They were requested to bring picked contingents of troops from each colony to march with men from every other part of the Empire in the old Queen's honour. It was an irresistible invitation. They all accepted—the Premiers of Canada and Newfoundland, of the six Australian Colonies and of New Zealand, of the Cape and Natal.

Needless to say this response made another Imperial Conference inevitable. What he hoped from it the Colonial Secretary stated in a stirring speech at Birmingham: "An interchange of ideas about matters of common and material interest, about closer commercial union, about the representation of the Colonies, about common defence, about legislation, about other questions of equal importance which cannot but be productive of the most fruitful results".[2] It would be the fullest discussion of inter-Imperial problems that had ever yet taken place.

Once more fortune prospered boldness. Before the arrival of the representatives of the overseas States, there happened in the greatest of them things which changed quietly the whole character of the movement for closer Imperial union.

First. Protection was continued by the Liberal party in Canada, thus extinguishing the last lingering expectation of a disappearance of colonial tariffs and their replacement by a Zollverein of the Empire with complete internal free trade.

[1] The first indication amongst the Chamberlain Papers of what happened is as follows: The Duke of Devonshire to Chamberlain, January 18, 1896: "You and Salisbury seemed to think there were not sufficient materials for holding a Colonial Conference this year, but you afterwards mentioned the idea of inviting the Colonial Premiers to come".

[2] Jewellers' Dinner, Birmingham, January 30, 1897.

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Second. Mr. Fielding, on April 23—the marked day of St. George and Shakespeare—made a celebrated move. In favour of British goods the Canadian general tariff was reduced by one-eighth immediately. Nor did the policy stop there. A 12½ per cent abatement was no contemptible concession. Better was the provision that in the following year the reduction would be increased to 25 per cent.

Third. The Laurier Government abandoned the project of commercial secession which Sir Richard Cartwright had adumbrated in his interview with Chamberlain at Danvers. The French Premier of the Great Dominion seemed to stand out as one of the most persuasive and effective of Imperialists. The innate dualism of his psychology was not divined.

VII

The Colonial Conference held during the summer of Queen Victoria's apotheosis was intended by Chamberlain to be as informal as possible, not fettered by any programme set by the British Government. It was to be a free and frank exchange of views between the Secretary of State and the eleven Premiers. By another stroke of happy statesmanship, they all had been named Privy Councillors on their arrival.

Before the Conference opened most of them, including Sir Wilfrid Laurier, visited "our own good city of Birmingham" and received a fervent welcome at a civic luncheon. On this occasion Chamberlain spoke with unquenchable faith:

> I, for one, have no doubt that this great Empire of ours, powerful as it is, is nothing to what it will become in the course of ages when it will be in permanence a guarantee for the peace and the civilisation of the world. . . . We think of the future of our race as well as the future of our own people, and it is in this view that we raise now a discussion which may perhaps not yet be ripe for settlement; but this is a creative and a critical time, and upon what we do now, and upon what we say now, may depend the future to which none of us can look forward without a feeling of inspiration.[1]

The Conference extended through a fortnight. There were five

[1] Birmingham, June 21, 1897.

sittings. Beginning on June 24, they were resumed at the Colonial Office every three or four days up to July 8, amidst the whirl of progresses, ceremonies and entertainments. The Colonial Secretary was in the chair, attended by Lord Selborne, his parliamentary Under-Secretary, and by officials of the Colonial Office. It was a historic fact of no small note that for the first time all the overseas delegates were heads of their respective States. In that regard the assembly was more like an Imperial Cabinet than anything before it. The Premiers represented Canada, Newfoundland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, the Cape, Natal. The eleven were a good team. Three were conspicuous. Reid of New South Wales, a great free trader waging a losing battle in his part of the world, surpassed the rest in sheer ability. Laurier was as easily first in distinction and accomplishment. Massive and sturdy Seddon of New Zealand, though primitive in some of his economic notions, was the most devoted Imperialist of them all.

Chamberlain's opening address was from this text: "We are in the position of those who desire rather to learn your views than to press ours upon you". He spoke with perspicuous ability but with scrupulous prudence. Ranging tersely over many topics his introductory survey does not lend itself much to verbal quotation, but one passage may be given as containing both an indication of the height to which political dreams had risen and as a graphic account of the system of sea-power upon which the existence of all the Empire then depended:

> I have said that the question to which I first directed your attention —that of closer relations—is greater than all the rest. I may say that it covers all the rest, because, of course, if Federation were established, or anything approaching to it, all these other questions to which I am now about to call your attention would be settled by whatever was the representative body of the Federation, and among them, and in the very first rank, must of necessity come the question of Imperial defence.
>
> Gentlemen, you have seen something of the military strength of the Empire; you will see on Saturday an astonishing representation of its naval strength, by which alone a Colonial Empire can be bound together.
>
> You are aware that that representation—great, magnificent, un-

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paralleled as it will be—is nevertheless only a part of the naval forces of the Empire spread in every part of the globe. . . . Now, these fleets, and this military armament, are not maintained exclusively or even mainly, for the benefit of the United Kingdom, or for the defence of home interests.

They are still more maintained as a necessity of Empire, for the maintenance and protection of Imperial trade all over the world, and if you will, for a moment, consider the history of this country during, say, the present century, or, I would say, during the present reign, you will find that every war, great or small, in which we have been engaged, has had at bottom a colonial interest, the interest, that is to say, either of a colony, or of a great dependency like India. That is absolutely true, and is likely to be true to the end of the chapter.[1]

The exposition as a whole, like the subsequent proceedings of the Conference, comes under three chief heads.

Political Relations? Was it feasible to create a "great Council of the Empire" which might grow into an ultimate Federal Council? "In this country, at all events, I may truly say that the idea of federation is in the air. Whether with you it has gone as far, is for you to say. . . . I feel that there is a real necessity for some better machinery of consultation between the self-governing colonies and the mother country, and it has sometimes struck me—I offer it now merely as a personal suggestion—that it might be feasible to create a great council of the Empire to which the colonies would send representative plenipotentiaries—not mere delegates. . . . If such a council were to be created it would at once assume an immense importance, and it is perfectly evident that it might develop into something still greater. It might slowly grow to that Federal Council to which we must always look forward as our ultimate ideal."

Defence? Was it not desirable, even vital, for the colonies to adopt some adequate and regular system of contributions to sea-power? Strong European rivals were pressing more closely upon colonial interests. Japan was rising in the Far East. On the military side our arrangements were all behindhand. Could we not have at least an interchangeability of troops? Canadian con-

[1] Confidential Report of Conference . . . at the Colonial Office, in June and July, 1897. A shorter report is in Cmd. 8, 596 of 1897.

tingents, for instance, training in Great Britain for twelve months while British contingents might go out to Canada. Could not Australia, New Zealand and South Africa enter into that system of interchange?

Commercial Relations? "How far is it possible to make those relations closer and more intimate? I have said that I believe in sentiment as the greatest of all the forces in the general government of the world, but, at the same time, I should like to bring to the reinforcement of sentiment the motives which are derived from material and personal interest." [1] A full Imperial Customs Union on the model of the German Zollverein, he implied, was for the present impracticable. So much he had learned. But Canada lately had introduced the principle of preference for Great Britain. It was a boon in intention but raised, as engagements stood, a serious international difficulty. Canadian preference, unfortunately, conflicted with existing treaties whereby Germany and Belgium possessed the right to commercial equality with the mother country throughout the British Empire. Under the "most favoured nation" clause many other foreign countries could claim the same privilege. Were these treaties to be denounced? To a unanimous affirmative by the Conference Her Majesty's Government would not hesitate to give effect. In that case his hope—implied though not asserted—was that all the Colonies would emulate Canada's example in giving a special tariff preference to the mother country.

As he had avoided rhetoric throughout this efficient analysis he closed without a peroration.

VIII

Of the further proceedings during the five sittings only a bare summary has been published. The full shorthand notes of the discussions lie before the present writer. There are a hundred and fifty printed pages of them, mostly devoted to keen general conversation and quick fence. There are many topics and disagreements. The Colonial Secretary listens more than he speaks. He intervenes briefly only to recall miscellaneous discussion to order.

[1] Confidential Report of Conference . . . at the Colonial Office, in June and July, 1897, p. 6.

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Even on the question of closer political union Canada was encouraging. True that Australia and South Africa would have to be federated on her own model so as to simplify the proposition before the constitution of a standing Council of the Empire would be possible. But at the fourth meeting Sir Wilfrid Laurier used words which seemed to others more far-reaching than he meant:

> I am quite satisfied with the condition of things as they are, but to imagine that will last for ever is a delusion. I venture from my heart to suggest that there is a good deal in representation. I conceive that it would be a good thing for the colonies to be represented on the floor of Parliament. It would not be impossible that the representatives of the Colonies in the Imperial Parliament should be allowed, as full-fledged members of that Parliament, the right to speak and not to vote, as is the case in America, where the representatives of certain territories have the right to speak and not to vote. They are enabled in this way to bring matters which concern them to the attention of the public . . . and they are very effective in that way. . . . You see the idea is a sentimental one. It has been suggested many and many a time since I have been in England that there is a great deal in sentiment—a very great deal in sentiment. This is a very great thing that will have to be dealt with at no distant date if the colonies are to continue to be colonies.[1]

Just before this, in the course of the same day's talk, the Canadian Premier said impressively:

> The day is not far distant when you will have in Canada a population of 10,000,000. With all the loyalty which exists in Canada at the present day, it will not be satisfactory to the Colony under such circumstances that the present relations should continue in their present condition. Those relations must get looser or they must get stronger; that is inevitable.[2]

Inter-Imperial relations must become stronger or looser? This posed the alternative that engaged Chamberlain's more concentrated character to his last day in public affairs. But

[1] Confidential Report of Conference . . . at the Colonial Office, in June and July, p. 107, Fourth Day, July 5, 1897.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 106. The population of Canada was a little over 5,000,000 when Laurier spoke as above. It reached the predicted figure of over 10,000,000 a generation later, in the year 1929.

there was no general support in the Conference for Sir Wilfrid's idea of colonial representation at Westminster.

On defence a procrastinating utterance yet prophetic came from Reid of New South Wales:

> The great test of our relations, I submit, will be the next war in which England is engaged. She is not ever likely to be engaged in an unrighteous war or in an aggressive war. If engaged in a defensive war you would find that sentiment would determine everything. Our money would come; our men would come . . . that feeling of patriotism, we may call it—it would flame out just as practically in the Colonies, in the hour of danger, as in England; but it is only in those moments that you can make the people one in the sense of sacrifice.[1]

Even Reid was in favour of trusting to impetus in emergency without binding arrangements beforehand. Defence was left to stand where it did. Sir Gordon Sprigg for the Cape offered the battleship which he proved unable to give; but the Cape made an annual contribution instead. The Australian colonies adhered to their principle of supporting squadrons for service in their own seas. They found no sufficient reassurance in the Admiralty doctrine that "the sea is one" and that the surest safeguard of the whole Empire was concentrated naval power giving invisible defence to the most distant parts.

On commercial relations, the debates barred once for all the proposal of an Imperial Zollverein, but opened a new hope. If the dream of "empire free trade" was extinguished, compensation might be formed some day in an enlarged conception of preference. On the fifth and last day Chamberlain concisely stated the position:

> Permit me to say that very definite suggestions have been before the Conference, and one of them has, to a certain extent, been approved, and another has been undoubtedly rejected by the general opinion of the Conference. The one which was rejected was the proposal for a Zollverein with free trade in the British Empire. The Colonies represented that that is, at all events at the present time, a counsel of perfection which they cannot contemplate as possible. Then the second

[1] Confidential Report of Conference . . . at the Colonial Office, in June and July, 1897, p. 107.

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proposal was that those Colonies which have a protective duty should be asked to consider whether they would not follow the example of Canada and give a preferential advantage to the mother-country.[1]

As initiated by the new Liberal Government in Canada preference meant in amount a much larger concession than hitherto had been understood by the name. The other Premiers were all in favour of following Sir Wilfrid Laurier's example, though they could not pledge themselves before returning overseas to consult their colleagues and test their parliaments.

And one other great thing was gained—a result combining fine symbolism at that moment and far-reaching importance for the future. The Premiers on July 5, 1897, adopted the resolution that Conferences should assemble at regular intervals. The general feeling favoured triennial meetings. Chamberlain was quick to emphasise that new fact. For "the first time in our history and in our Imperial history we are suggesting and agreeing to the desirability of a periodical conference of the representatives of all Colonies. That is the beginning of it—the beginning of a Federal conference."[2] These last two words show the fixed bent of his idea.

They all wanted him to visit the further parts of the Empire. Canada he knew. Now he was especially pressed to visit Australia. He had contemplated that voyage long ago when his political fortunes were at their lowest. At present, he explained, it was impossible. Other responsibilities were too many and onerous. "I could get as far as Canada, but I could not get further. . . . I did consider the possibility of getting to the Cape. I should only have a very short time there I am afraid. . . . I think it will be after I have left my office."[3] So little was it possible for him or for any of them to foresee what was to happen before the next Conference assembled five years after.

IX

While hopes for the future were not daunted in the Colonial Secretary, the failure to effect any kind of immediate closer

[1] Confidential Report of Conference . . . at the Colonial Office, in June and July, 1897, p. 154, July 8, 1896.

[2] *Ibid.* July 5, 1897, p. 117.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 111.

union even for maritime defence seemed disappointing and even ironical by comparison with the outward grandeurs of the Jubilee celebrations. As President of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, the Duke of Devonshire, towards the close of the Conference, made rather perturbed enquiry about its progress. Chamberlain replied amusingly but with acute candour:

CHAMBERLAIN TO THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE

July 4.—I can best answer your question by describing the position in a few words:

All the Premiers are much impressed by their reception and the prevalence of the Imperial spirit.

All of them are personally favourable to closer union. Mr. Reid,[1] the cleverest of them all, is genuinely patriotic and ready to risk something for the idea. The others are Premiers first and patriots second—and they have a natural fear that if they commit themselves too far, they may be reproached when they get home with having sacrificed colonial interests to the flesh-pots of Egypt.

Our policy is to continue to impress our wishes and hopes for union and to leave the leaven to work. Union will not come in a hurry, and must follow the Federation of Australia and the South-African Colonies. But the great thing is—to use a railway expression—to get the points right. If we do this we shall go on on parallel lines for the future. If we make any mistake we shall get wider and wider apart till the separation is complete.

I think therefore that a speech of the kind made by you at Liverpool is still the right thing. Impress upon them the fact that it is a great privilege to be part of the British Empire—and that we desire them to remain so—not in our own interests, but in the interests of the race.

Here the Colonial Secretary hits upon one of the best metaphors known to practical yet far-sighted statesmanship: "The great thing is, to use a railway expression, to get the points right".

Though the conference had failed to strengthen Imperial defence, or to create a Customs Union, the results in the commercial sphere were of high significance. At least the diplomatic way was now to be cleared for the application of the new

[1] The Free Trade Premier of New South Wales.

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Canadian method of Preference and for its adoption by other overseas States. A few weeks later the British Government denounced the old German and Belgian treaties restraining the Colonies from giving particular advantages to the mother country.[1]

The singular thing, it has been thought, is that from this time for some years he keeps silence on what had been his engrossing desire. The set theme of Imperial Federation vanishes from his public speeches with his project of an Imperial Zollverein on a basis of internal free trade. Ceaseless foreign and South African complications partly account for the silence. There was another reason. If he moved again with power for closer union, he would have to stake himself upon a revolutionary effort to reverse altogether the national commercial policy of Cobden and Peel. He had no objection in doctrine, but as yet and for long it did not seem likely that an attempt of that magnitude could become a political possibility during his lifetime. As we now know, looking back, the course of his mind may be likened to a stream which sinks suddenly in the limestone, runs far underground, and reappears.

That inexplicable thing, the force of personality, may be stronger than any system. So in this case. Though formal achievement might tarry, closer union in spirit was powerfully promoted. Chamberlain's own active and magnetic personality spread an influence through the Empire and drew it together by sentiment and aspiration in a way that has never been replaced. He had brought the overseas Premiers to London, and there brushing aside all the precedents of etiquette he brought them to the front. The human effect both on themselves and on public feeling at home far surpassed in political value the private proceedings of the Conference.

This man who might have been Radical Prime Minister—who risked political destruction when he revolted against Gladstone and seceded by degrees from his old party in a temper both reluctant and remorseless—this man, nominally a subordinate in a

[1] Lord Salisbury denounced the treaties on July 28. The typical clause in the German treaty ran: "In those Colonies and possessions the produce of the States of the Zollverein shall not be subject to any higher or other import duties than the produce of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" (Anglo-Zollverein Treaty of 1875).



Photo *Henry Dixon & Son*

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, 1897

After the portrait by J. S. Sargent, R.A.

Unionist Government, had the majority of Britain at his back after all; and the majority of Greater Britain as well.

X

We come to the Greater Jubilee itself and to the far-reaching influences for good and ill which lay behind the blaze of homage to the Queen's most excellent Majesty. It is not easy, perhaps it is not possible, for living recollection to suggest even faintly to a later age what depth of reverential emotion, what breadth of political vision entered into those days of changing pageantry; nor what were the alternating pulses of affection and pride; nor what was the imaginative power of historic association; while in many minds graver thoughts questioning the future mingled with all the ceremonies and the splendour. As Gibbon in a chastening sentence says of the secular games, public instinct felt that sense of solemnity always belonging to any great spectacle which the oldest have never seen before and the youngest will never see again.

The Queen had lived to be beloved again like no other sovereign at the end of so long a reign, and her subjects of the newer generation knew nothing of the years of coldness that had been between her and the nation. She had seen the rise of another Empire more extended and various than that which Chatham had won for a time, and her grandfather had shattered. Deriving from no plan but created by circumstances, her own Empire so far exceeded any comparison in history that but for its actual existence no mind could have conceived its possibility. She was a woman and nearly eighty; the mother of many peoples; regarded with both chivalry towards her sex and veneration towards her age. While prosperity increased at home, the drums beat every few years—of late every year—for some campaign or another on the frontiers; and often in the little wars, in the course of service on the outposts, there was something to recall the Elizabethan spirit rightly understood. For in that spirit, too, some bombast and vainglory were inseparable from adventure and courage. Though all foreign nations joined as in 1887 to do honour to the Queen, the salient trait in the celebrations of the Greater Jubilee of 1897 was the appearance of the men repre-

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senting the new democracies which across the oceans had arisen under her reign.

At Buckingham Palace, the Colonial Secretary presents the Premiers and Mrs. Chamberlain their wives. Next day, June 19, the sixtieth year of the reign would be completed. He gets up at an unearthly hour for the Royal procession to the city and the service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's. London, with the wooden barricades and tiers, is like a city gaily besieged. Thronged are all the approaches and packed is the scene all round St. Paul's, where he waits until the Colonial Premiers arrive with their military contingents. Amidst the cheering they take their places with the members of Lord Salisbury's Cabinet. Deafening sounds herald Her Majesty's coming. The religious service is held nobly in front of London's cathedral. When it concludes the strains of the "Old Hundredth" and "God save the Queen" are taken up by the multitude and roll far away.

At night with the zest of a boy Chamberlain insists, against headshakings and warnings, upon plunging into the crowd to see the illuminations. With his wife he watches the searchlights playing on St. Paul's; walks along Cheapside, known to generations of his ancestors; and so to the Bank; and back along the river, alive with gleams, towards the radiance of Pall Mall and Piccadilly. Five miles of it and no mishap; "the crowd eager, good-natured, interested—as we saw them, all behaving well".[1] Perhaps it is not at all fantastical to see in this escapade on foot, as much as in his platform speeches, that the pith of his strength in politics was his incorrigible kinship with the ordinary Englishman.

Of other occasions we must single out the Naval Review at Portsmouth. In the yacht "Wildfire" he takes the Premiers to see ships and ships stretching out of sight. They all feel that nothing but this stands between the vast empire and destruction, but feel also—and like himself even too confidently—that this sole security will hold good for foreseeable time.

The Colonial Secretary himself stood out separately at his celebrated reception on the last night of June for the Premiers and other Colonial guests to meet the Prince and Princess of Wales. No pains or expense had been spared over this affair.

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, July 6, 1897.

Some large house had to be found for it. Hertford House and Dorchester House were thought of in turn; neither was available. Jubilee prices were a fable. On Mrs. Chamberlain fell a burthen which even now may well awaken every woman's sympathy. One modest letter offered a suitable mansion and asked 3000 guineas for one day's use. At last the place taken was Sir Julian Goldsmid's house at 105 Piccadilly, then empty; but when the great night arrived, French eighteenth-century furniture, tapestries, and flowers transformed it. The flowers, his special pleasure, were in a mass and glow that remained one of the particular memories even of that London season. At dinner were the Duke and Duchess of York—their present Majesties King George and Queen Mary—and afterwards many hundreds of guests poured in on a stifling night.[1] Too many as some complained; but already the lists had been heavily cut down and could not be reduced further without wounding susceptibilities which it was the Minister's duty to spare.

Recalling this scene, Lord Morris of Newfoundland remarked in a talk with the present writer, how the Colonial guests said to each other that the real master-force of the Empire at that moment was "this man in knee-breeches and buckles who had once been a screw-maker"!

Unfortunately the crowd outside was so dense that the Prince and Princess of Wales never appeared. They could not leave their carriage, though the police had been charged to take every precaution to keep an open way.

Every day was giddy with endless functions and ceremonies. At the luncheon given to the Premiers by Lord Esher, the Master of the Rolls, at the Record Office, Mrs. Chamberlain was shown an ancient volume containing a letter, "very quaint, puritanical and polite", written from Salem in 1652 by her ancestor John Endicott.[2] Family tradition demands that the overseas statesmen shall be entertained by the Cordwainers' Company. Our man of the hour is suddenly summoned to take tea on the terrace of the House of Commons with the King of Siam. The Devonshire House Ball, the most renowned entertainment of the period, is recollected still by a few survivors, though the very

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, July 7 and July 9, 1897.
[2] *Ibid.* July 14, 1897.

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walls that framed it have lately vanished. Sir William Harcourt represented to the life his own ancestor Queen Anne's Lord Chancellor; Asquith came as a Roundhead; Mrs. Chamberlain was Madame D'Epinay; and for the Colonial Secretary, whose clean-cut countenance lent itself to a Louis Seize suit with sword and red heels, the name of Baron von Grimm did as well as another.[1] Though a more literary politician Grimm, too, could speak his mind in his day.

Add the private interviews at the Colonial Office with the Premiers separately, and with other colonial callers. On the whole, the human success of Chamberlain's effort to exalt and please the self-governing Colonies was a kindling service to the Empire. He had done more than any statesman before him to promote unity of feeling despite delay in securing more unity of organisation. The Premiers before leaving sent him warm-hearted acknowledgments. Lord Morris, already quoted, sums up, the impression of a Newfoundland visitor: " 'Joseph' ran the whole thing in the Jubilee—or so the Dominions thought.[2] His influence was everywhere. The Premiers enjoyed more privileges then than most members of the British Government." Just before their departure they went to Windsor, where the Colonial Minister joined them. With much state, the Queen being very gracious to them, they were all formally sworn in as members of the Privy Council, an event in itself of no mean mark in the annals of the Empire.

XI

When we look at his list of engagements political and social during the June and July of this hot summer, what he got through seems incredible. Between the acts, as we may put it, the boxes and messages pursued him. He had to steer the Workmen's Compensation Bill, and sometimes after a speech at a public dinner had to fly back to the House to defend or modify clauses. Further, up to the last week of the session he had to watch every turn of the South African enquiry, never knowing to the end whether he might not be further assailed; forced to keep in his mind the details of an enormous mass of evidence.

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, July 9, 1897.

[2] This reminiscence was communicated a quarter of a century later when the term "Colonies" was superseded.

By the end of July he was out of that long and perilous entanglement. Milner had taken over in South Africa, where prospects looked fairer. The Compensation Act in a few days would be placed on the Statute-book. The Greater Jubilee devoted to memories was itself already but a memory. He had bade good-bye to the overseas statesmen. Lord Salisbury had denounced the German and Belgian treaties forbidding Imperial preference. The warning and prophecy of Kipling's great "Recessional" had appeared. All through, the Colonial Minister felt that sterner days would come soon enough.

The end of the session at the beginning of August brought a long-drawn breath of relief. During some weeks at Highbury he was out in the air nearly all day, sitting under the trees, strolling with the gardeners, marking the growth of the saplings planted to make a screen against the thickening growth of the small houses on the opposite hill; with intervals indoors when he reviewed the array of his orchids, as living to him as men on parade. But much as he enjoyed his physical relaxation, mental indolence did not last long. Soon it was evident to those nearest to him that he was full of fresh ideas and intentions. The Jubilee and the Conference marked the stretch of a reign that a few years more must bring to a close. For his mind and nature—always thinking of to-morrow, as John Morley noticed from the first—the commemoration of sixty Victorian years could not be anything but a stimulus to some new beginning.

XII

As a public speaker he was far more frequently in request by now than any other man. Glasgow University had elected him its Lord Rector. After a holiday in Switzerland and Italy, he visited that city to be installed and to deliver his address, and to make a series of speeches, political and non-political, on subsequent days. His reception was called huge. On the evening of his arrival students in masquerade made a wild scene lit by torches. With difficulty was he extricated from the mass of enthusiasts pressing to shake hands.[1] The interest was so

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, November 2, 1897.

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great that to replace the modest accommodation in Bute Hall of the College the authorities had engaged St. Andrew's Hall holding nearly five thousand people—a place already known to him and destined, in a way of which he had then no apprehension, to be associated with the final crisis of his public life.

In this scene he gave his Rectorial address. His theme was "Patriotism". Well knowing what eloquence and significance had been attained by predecessors of literary genius he had taken pains to a degree seldom equalled even by him. Not only that. He meant to read his address—an intention which made his friends nervous, needlessly as it proved. He had made himself so familiar with his text that no remembered "Rectorial" was so perfectly delivered. Lord Kelvin and others declared it was the finest they had ever heard.

On the text, as read in cold print, opinion was more divided. He argued legitimately that a widening sense of patriotism must embrace the British Empire as a whole. But instead of doing calm justice to the arguments this view has to overcome, he dismissed the opposite position with implied contumely. Some references to "little Englanders" and a "policy of surrender" were platform matter out of place upon an academic occasion. Full of effective perceptions, in detail, this "Rectorial" lacked the flow of true oratory proper to a theme so classical. Nor was it a contribution to analytical thought. Nothing in it equals his best sustained passages in other connections. But this is only to say that depth and subtlety of philosophical discourse were not amongst Chamberlain's gifts. He only excelled as a man of words when he spoke as a man in action.

The University had no cause to regret an experiment so widely remarked, and in the next days he was upon his own ground. As the guest of Unionist Clubs he made party speeches in raking style. By contrast, in five rousing minutes on the Stock Exchange he spoke like an Imperial trustee without a trace of partisanship when he advocated the more confident flow of British capital into enterprise overseas. In this sort of energising appeal kept to the practical point we have had no one quite like him. Presented with the freedom of the City, he dwelt like a dispassionate citizen on the dignity of municipal work. With profound sincerity he urged his hearers to "keep

up the standard"—one of his favourite phrases about everything.

It ought to be recollected that in this late autumn of 1897, reverberating with platform deliverances in the old ample and reported style, other Unionist statesmen were in tune with their most incisive colleague. They variously vindicated British policy, and stronger defence. Chamberlain's voice only caused louder echoes and counter-cries than any other voice. The European press was full of the Englishman with the set lips, the taut eyebrows, the caustic tongue and the eye-glass. Caricatures written and pictured swarmed abroad, especially in France. Foreign journals were further excited by rumours of deep dissension between a pacific Lord Salisbury and an aggressive Colonial Minister. His "patriotism" as expounded at Glasgow was, of course, called "jingoism". Every considerable nation in the world maintained that by comparison with other countries—except those actually allied to itself—the motives of its policy were moderate and pure.

In Britain, likewise, we were apt to describe the necessary movements of foreign nations in the colonial sphere as "proceedings", and their activities as "intrigues". None the less it was the case that a new era was beginning with more complicated and fatalistic antagonisms in world-policy and cumulative competition in armaments. These courses led on with little deviation to the world's catastrophe in 1914. As we shall find, it was not Chamberlain's fault that the most formidable of all the elements of this situation—the rivalry between Britain and Germany—was not eliminated in time.

"I hope", said his wife, shortly after the Jubilee, to her parents in Massachusetts, "the next eighteen months will be freer from anxiety, for I think Joe has had as much of it as is good for anyone."[1] That freedom at least was not to be.

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, August 6, 1897.

CHAPTER LV

PARTITION OF WEST AFRICA—"SUSPENDED WAR" AND A GREAT AGREEMENT

(1897–1898)

THE Instinct of the "Recessional"—After the Jubilee—"Towards 1914"—A New Age of World-Crises—The Colonial Secretary and West Africa—A Ruined Holiday—M. Hanotaux's "Grand Design"—The Hinterlands overrun by French Troops—"Effective Occupation" *versus* "Prior Treaties"—Chamberlain's Counter-measures—West African Frontier Force Organised—Rival Contingents Face to Face—Negotiations and Perils—Differences between Salisbury and Chamberlain—The Colonial Secretary's Tenacity—The Great Anglo-French Settlement of June 1898—Nigeria as a New Bengal.

I

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AFTER a climax of false optimism the warning of Kipling's "Recessional" seemed like second sight. When the threads of colonial and foreign affairs now crossed inextricably and made one web, Chamberlain was ceaselessly involved. Hardly over was the halcyon summer when clouds began to rise and drifted together from all quarters but one, until the whole sky was ominous except to westward. On that side, the Atlantic horizon cleared and for some time remained brighter than it had been since the separation of the United States from the mother country. But that rift did not shine until the British system of isolation in foreign affairs, exposed in all its weakness by three Powers, had been brought to the verge of conflict.

Pretty soon, nothing but the yet unassailable fleet which had stretched out of sight at the Spithead review would stand between the Empire and wide hostility. The creation of the new German navy had just begun in earnest. By autumn M. Hanotaux's set policy of "active occupation" throughout the hinter-

land of our West African colonies, regardless of prior British treaties with native Chiefs, brought England and France to the brink of war on the Niger. Rumour full of tongues and telegrams—and for once as full of truth—repeated that Marchand had already pushed far into the basin of the Bahr al Ghazal flowing into the upper Nile and was nearing the tropical reaches of the river of Egypt.

Then Germany seized Kiao-chau and Russia Port Arthur. These resounding strokes threatened for a time nothing less than the partition of China. For months in the common view abroad, Britain's plight was one of decadent impotence. In truth it was galling and hazardous enough while Asiatic and African crises were at their height together.

In these emergencies the Colonial Secretary becomes a world-statesman with whom every country reckons. At home he is in effect a co-premier in what the German Emperor called a "two-headed administration".

II

Lord Salisbury said publicly that "Africa was created to be the plague of Foreign Offices", and he jested privately that the Colonial Secretary "hated giving anything away". Chamberlain said that what he hated was giving something for nothing. Tenacious but adaptable as, in so many dealings, we have seen him, his stipulation always was reciprocal concession—large for large, small for small.

Under the overwhelming pressure of the Jubilee season he had no chance, as he afterwards remarked, to concentrate upon the West African region of his multifold responsibilities nor fully to realise what movements there were emerging from a background which had been full of obscure activities. Not until his holiday in the autumn of 1897 had he leisure to make a close study of the papers. Then indeed the papers opened his eyes. He was brought to a conviction. If much on the lower Niger was to be saved, there was not only a stand to be made but a push to be organised. And there was little time to lose.

His instinct had been uneasy through the summer of 1897. He protested to the Prime Minister that in Tunis, Madagascar and Siam we had given the French all they claimed without sticking

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for better terms regarding the Nile, the Niger or the Newfoundland shore; and that this method would lead to further encroachments. "We have thrown away all our cards and they keep all theirs in their hands. . . . I firmly believe that if we do not show that we will not be trifled with we shall finally be driven into war, with the disadvantage of having already surrendered much that is valuable."[1] Far the superior letter-writer in point of finesse, Salisbury on these occasions could be a master of almost elusive irony. Considering the situations created before the Unionist Government came into office, he suggested that we had given away nothing but the irrecoverable.[2] This by no means convinces the Colonial Secretary, who refrains from rejoinder. He does not wish, if he can help it, to ruffle the Prime Minister.

Only in the recess after the Jubilee was he able "to examine carefully for myself all the arguments and counter-arguments in the matter". While pursuing that enquiry he received news that the French mobile columns were not only entering still farther into territory absolutely claimed and ultimately held by Britain. They were using that territory as their own by bringing up supplies and convoys through it to support continued trespass in two directions—down the Niger stream itself and overland towards still lower reaches of the river.

In Paris the Niger question had been long and fruitlessly discussed between representatives of the two nations. The Quai d'Orsay desired to resume these conversations but without arresting French military activities. On these unsatisfactory terms Lord Salisbury accepted the renewal of conference as the lesser evil. Chamberlain deferred to the Prime Minister's judgment but his own opinion was downright. "My own idea was that the only hope of a peaceful arrangement was to convince the French, from the first, that they had tried our patience too far and that they must give way or take the consequences."[3] His instinctive anticipation of coming realities in West Africa was sure enough. Through nearly nine critical months the situation of "suspended war" became more and more acute. To understand the sequel

[1] Chamberlain to Salisbury, June 6, 1897.

[2] Salisbury to Chamberlain, June 7.

[3] Chamberlain to Lord Selborne, from Interlaken, September 12, 1897.

we must do some justice to the French as well as the British side in this great episode of the partition of Africa.

III

The French side compels high admiration. Dreaming of an empire stretching across equatorial Africa from Senegal to the Red Sea, General Faidherbe was the original inspirer of a sustained movement worthy of Dupleix in design and destined to better fortune. Crossing the highlands, the French established themselves on the headwaters of the Niger in the early 'eighties. Breaking the Mohammedan rulers and confederacies, they had advanced by 1894 to Timbuctoo.

Not far beyond that city, no longer mysterious, occurs a famous geographical change, which at that period became of equal political significance. The great river after its long flow to its northernmost point reverses its course and sweeps south-eastward towards the sea; and so towards the sphere claimed by the British but not yet guarded in that direction by admitted boundaries. In the half-explored region within this vast bend of the Niger the final struggle for the division of West Africa would have to be fought out either in diplomatic terms or sterner. Especially in the half-decade before Chamberlain took office, the French effort showed a methodical and ubiquitous ability never of its kind surpassed. The region swarmed with effective little expeditions. Well may a good French writer praise the countless instances of intrepid devotion which contributed in this quarter to "*notre merveilleuse épopée africaine*".[1] All authorities agree that in West Africa our neighbours were altogether superior in colonial energy and system until Chamberlain intervened.

Single-handed almost, another Englishman had worked wonders, and without him the Colonial Secretary on taking charge would have found the British position in West Africa reduced to insignificance. Sir George Goldie, as the life and soul of the Royal Niger Company, had created a wide British suzerainty. He had done this against the prolonged opposition of Germany

[1] Robert de Caix, in *Histoire Générale*, edited by Ernest Lavisse and Alfred Rambaud, vol. xii. pp. 725-726.

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as well as France, but he was now about to be faced by a situation with which no Chartered Company could cope.

"Mr. Chamberlain alone of all our statesmen", records a well-known witness, "saw the great possibilities and importance of West Africa."[1] The same witness, Miss Mary Kingsley, described in an amusing letter to him the effect created even there by his appointment as Colonial Secretary:

> The news went round that things had got to be done; activity was going to be in the fashion—so, anxious to win your approval, all hands bestirred themselves. Some of my friends went about after dark in stores with kerosene lamps whereby there were conflagrations that night and no stores next morning; others scraped neglected steam launches until they leaked like lobster pots; one in hope of getting a Government grant started bringing in a water supply from a neighbouring stream with a noble disregard for hydrostatics; conversation became stiff with railways, drains, hospitals and coinage.

Just after the Unionist Government came in, a delusive lull in West Africa coincided with a weak Ministry in Paris. Then in the spring of 1896 a stronger French Cabinet was formed, and colonial activity was resumed with a vengeance. The real originator of this movement was a brilliant though serious Frenchman, who, like no other modern statesman, worked on a fixed theory to the extremity of its abstract logic without normal regard to consequences. It required a steely kind of Englishman to cope with Hanotaux.

It might easily be said that the accomplished biographer of Richelieu was no Richelieu himself. This would be a very superficial epigram. A trained diplomatist as well as a distinguished student, Monsieur Hanotaux was just forty and in the prime of vigour when he entered the Dupuy Cabinet—one of the more talented under the Third Republic—at the end of May 1894. With one break this new man held office for several years. He continued, accentuated, systematised French activities in West Africa. His patriotism was a religion and that religion a code. He hoped to dominate the Niger and constrain the British to relax their hold on the Nile. Behind him, the French colonial group was a spurring influence. Academician and statesman,

[1] Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 307.

M. Hanotaux with stylistic fervour has composed his own apologia in *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, which would have been a still better book could its author have brought himself to confess the least tincture of human infirmity. His pages vibrate with suppressed passion. The utmost expansion of France in Africa was his aim; his grand dream not only that the area of uninterrupted possession must reach from the Mediterranean to the Congo, but that a transverse sphere of ascendancy should range from the Atlantic to the Red Sea.

Captain Marchand was to ensure access to the Upper Nile; thence, as the reverie supposed, connecting through a friendly and active Abyssinia with French territory beyond at the southward entrance to the Red Sea opposite Aden. All plans for a British route from Cape to Cairo would be frustrated.[1]

What more concerns this chapter is that Hanotaux hoped also to descend down the lower Niger into the sphere which Chamberlain in his turn was absolutely bent to maintain and organise.

IV

If the French aims were immense, the methods now adopted were those of logic in action. Immediately after the formation of the Méline Cabinet at the end of April 1896 it was resolved that the best mode of action on the Niger was to confront Britain with a series of accomplished facts.[2] The Governor of Dahomey, M. Ballot, then on leave in France, was to carry out on his return to his post what may be called intensive instructions. Expeditions led by the officers under his command were to strike straight into the region claimed by Britain and were then to spread out "fanwise".[3]

By the autumn of 1897, while Chamberlain was abroad but taking up the West African question in dead earnest, the French contingents had broken widely into what the Colonial Office held to be our indisputable sphere. They had occupied on the right bank of the Niger itself a long stretch that Chamberlain

[1] Hanotaux's admitted policy of exciting Abyssinia to descend on the Nile could have had no other effect, though he denies the intention. *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, pp. 132-135 and p. 155.

[2] André Lebon, *La Politique de la France en Afrique*, 1896-1898, p. 66. M. Lebon himself, who writes carefully, was Minister for the Colonies in the Méline Cabinet.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 67.

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was determined not to surrender. The occupation came down to below Bussa, a position of marked commercial and strategical importance where the river throws itself over a succession of violent rapids extending for fifty miles and more. Another expedition, already on the march from Dahomey, might soon hoist the tricolour at posts still lower down-stream.

Rain nearly all the time made the Colonial Secretary's holiday in Switzerland and on Lake Como literally a wash-out. By comparison the concentration and decision demanded by the letters and telegrams on the West African crisis may have been a relief. The Governor at Lagos sent alarming messages that the French were occupying new points by taking short cuts for men and supplies through territory unquestionably British and recognised as such by them. Troubled chiefly by the Prime Minister's doubts about the validity of a good deal of the British case, Chamberlain held it in the main to be sound and that it ought to be supported "even at the cost of war".[1] The Colonial Office amidst thickening anxieties longed for "the chief's" return.

"I do wish you were here", wrote Lord Selborne at the end of September. A fortnight later the Colonial Secretary was there—in his accustomed chair in the big sedate room with the "globe" and the maps. He writes to his wife: "I think it was time I came back and the effect will be felt at once".[2] He added his hope that "we shall gain our point, although it will be a near touch, and we move only just in time".

The immediate need was to counteract the policy of confronting this country with accomplished facts. The situation had been largely rushed at our expense, owing to the inequality of military conditions. Through all the debatable region within the bend of the Niger our hands had been forced by mercurial and strenuous French officers with their Senegalese troops. We had no similar forces in the critical area. As a naval nation with a small regular army we had no means of competing with tactics of military penetration simultaneously employed at many points.

At Chamberlain's urging, measures were already in hand for the creation of a new corps, soon to be well and honourably known as the West African Frontier Force. The handy "Waffs"

[1] Chamberlain to Selborne, September 28, 1897.

[2] Chamberlain to his wife, October 14, 1897.

would enable us for the first time to meet occupation with occupation where we had nothing to rely on so far but paper—the prior treaties with the native kings and chiefs.

This excellent stroke was typical of Chamberlain's organising resource in emergency.

The "Waffs" were to be a corps of Haussas and Yorubas, 2000 strong to begin with. Born to the climate, cheerfully amenable to discipline, they were able to march much farther and with a lighter pack than the old West Indian troops with their masses of luggage and crowds of carriers. The command was given to Colonel Lugard, in whom Chamberlain saw his Clive, and who, in turn, was as proud of a political chief in whom he found the stirring qualities of a Chatham. Lugard, at that time in South Africa, was called home. He had first attracted the Colonial Secretary's attention by his exploits in Uganda, and since then, by serving as an officer of the Royal Niger Company, had become the very man now required. He selected another born soldier, Colonel James Willcocks, as his second.

Before the West African Frontier Force could be ready the risk might be touch and go. The Colonial Office, anxious to contrive some earlier move, desired the aid of the redoubtable head of the Royal Niger Company. Sir George Goldie's reputation was at its height, since earlier in the year a brilliant little campaign under his personal direction had overthrown on both sides of the Niger the powerful Mohammedan Emirs of Nupe and Ilorin. Goldie refused to take the responsibility of weakening his limited forces in his own sphere by co-operating outside it unless the future of his Chartered Company were guaranteed. He had rendered inestimable services to the Crown, but was a high-handed and irascible personage. The Colonial Secretary thoroughly appreciated the services, but he would stand no nonsense from the founder of Nigeria any more than from that still greater Chartered magnate, the creator of Rhodesia. To the masterful man he made a more masterful retort and meant every word of it:

CHAMBERLAIN TO LORD SELBORNE

Cadenabbia, September 19, 1897.— . . . Now Goldie seems refractory and practically refuses to move. . . . I should like to tell him that the

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British Government do not understand the contract with the Company as he does, nor do they agree that he is to take all the profits and that we are to spend hundreds of thousands or possibly millions in securing his claims against the French and that he is then to step in and enjoy without cost all the security that we have gained for him.

If this is his view our best course will be to expropriate him, lock, stock and barrel, paying the capital value of his property but allowing nothing for goodwill or future profits since these are altogether dependent on the expeditions we are to make. In fact I should take a very high line with him and tell him that in this crisis he must be with us or against us, and that we cannot allow him to dictate terms.

Tight as was this emergency when time pressed so hard, it was decided to carry on without Sir George Goldie. Few episodes are more illustrative of Chamberlain's quality of command and of his courage in the public interest. He admired the head of the Niger Company as with more reserve he admired Rhodes, but in dealing as the Queen's representative with potent interests of this kind he never knew fear nor favour.

V

While the military measures were in train, and afterwards, Chamberlain had to play his part in the crucial diplomatic encounter. Even the Quai d'Orsay never had been more persistent, nay apparently more inflexible, in any struggle.[1]

The two main issues have been indicated—whether the full command of the lower Niger and its basin, a region measuring about six hundred miles each way, and as valuable as large, should remain in British hands; and whether our old colonies strung out at intervals along the coast were to be still further constricted and isolated by systematic French pressure behind them and between them. The Gambia had been reduced to a narrow strip along the river. Sierra Leone was closely confined. Their opportunities in transit trade were largely cut off when

[1] *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, p. 87, where M. Hanotaux describes his method, based upon a profoundly false estimate of British psychology: "*Avec les Anglais, il faut toujours traiter mais toujours agir; saisir et nouer promptement; en tout cas ne jamais perdre le contact; s'expliquer, insister, y revenir pour être assuré qu'on est bien compris; marcher sans détour et sans feinte, être exact pour être fidèle et compter sur la fidélité dans l'exactitude*".

their prospects of territorial growth were closed. Chamberlain determined that this process must cease. The remaining West African colonies not yet shut in must have their share of the interior. These, as he once put it, must not be "strangled". He said to Lord Selborne:

> We ought—even at the cost of war—to keep the hinterland for the Gold Coast, Lagos and the Niger territories. We ought not to allow the Gambia and Sierra Leone business to be repeated.[1]

A few further words will elucidate the diplomatic technique of this intricate controversy. Just about where did we mean to make our stand? What line did we mean to maintain? It was a question of parallels and meridians explained by a glance at the map but hard to make intelligible by words. Two diplomatic instruments seemed to have established finality up to a point in the north and to a point in the west.[2] But between these points was a gap of uncertainty hundreds of miles wide.

By the autumn of 1897, as we saw, the French expeditions had rushed the whole of that gap. By the "fan-wise" movement originally planned in Paris[3] they had spread themselves along the river to the key-position of Bussa; and elsewhere within the Niger bend they were marching through large areas where British claims were based on diplomatic claims not perhaps conclusive but not to be swept aside by abrupt military attack.

The clash of facts sprang from a conflict of principles. The essence of M. Hanotaux's case was that "effective occupation" conferred superior right. His favourite phrase "possession is title" describes the crux of the debate. The British, on the contrary, had relied on the more leisurely assumption that title belonged to priority of treaties with native potentates. Actual occupation was a matter that we had intended in our way to manage by unhurried degrees.

One example made a lively figure in the journalism of the time on both sides of the Channel. It was the case of Nikki, supposed to be the almost ruling capital of the vague kingdom of Borgu. In the summer of 1894 it was announced that the French

[1] September 29, 1897.

[2] For the two agreements, August 10, 1889, and August 5, 1890, see Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, vol. ii. pp. 729-737 and pp. 738-741.

[3] André Lebon as already quoted, *La Politique de la France en Afrique, 1896–1898*, p. 67.

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Government was about to dispatch a mission from Dahomey to make treaties with Borgu. For that purpose Captain Decœur left France on July 27. Our Captain Lugard, entrusted by the Niger Company with the counter-errand, left England four days later. This emulation was what some Paris newspapers called the steeplechase. Lugard appeared at Nikki and obtained his treaty five days before Decœur arrived.[1] But since then for three years we had left Nikki to itself, and in November 1897 it was captured after a sharp fight by one of the columns working "fan-wise" from Dahomey. Throughout the interior there were many other instances of presumptive British sovereignty but deferred occupation. Why not, we had said in our ordinary way. It was not Chamberlain's way. And M. Hanotaux's system was brought to a limit.

At the end of October the Niger Conference had resumed its sittings in Paris. Juridical and geographical arguments dragged on, while the situation of danger in West Africa itself became more acute.

For the first time there was a serious divergence of view between the two principal members of the Unionist Cabinet. On December 1 the Colonial Secretary felt it necessary, though with reluctance, to submit to Salisbury a stiff protest.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

December 1, 1897.—I regret that I am unable to agree with the proposal in the Foreign Office memorandum that we should concede to France a position on the West bank of the Niger in the neighbourhood of Jebba,[2] and a right of way across our territory from there to the northern territory of Dahomey. I believe that a grant to another European nation of an *enclave* in British territory is unprecedented and would lead to the most serious complications in the future. There is some confusion in the despatches between a definite concession of a port on the Niger, and what is called free access to the Niger, and free navigation of the river. The last two points we may readily concede in principle. . . . In any transaction the sacrifice made on both sides should be similar in character. Doubtful claims may be exchanged for doubtful claims and

[1] Mockler-Ferryman, *British West Africa*, pp. 424-425.

[2] Jebba is the point where, with the aid of an island in mid-stream, the present railway is carried across the Niger.

rights for rights; but the French only propose to abandon doubtful claims in exchange for the surrender by us of undoubted rights.

The above is written on the assumption that the French propose to deal with West Africa by itself. If they seriously suggested a general settlement, including Egypt and Newfoundland, the circumstances would be entirely altered and must be regarded from a new point of view. . . . I do not think that we ought to yield a jot to threats. . . .

To Lord Selborne he wrote on the same date:

Lord Salisbury's memorandum and his telegram to Monson are most discouraging. I thought he was entirely with us and now he is prepared to give away everything and get nothing. I am more than sorry to differ from him, but I cannot stand it.

There does not seem to have been any written reply from the Foreign Office or Hatfield.

VI

At Paris after the New Year, the Niger Commissioners continued their worm-like labour into the spring of 1898, without coming one inch nearer to settlement. The "face to face" situation of rival contingents in the hinterland became not less but more tense. The dispatches from our ambassador in Paris had been alarming enough for some time but now he took a lurid view. In mid-January his private opinion confided to the Prime Minister was passed on to Chamberlain:

In view of the existing irritation in the army; and the general feeling of unrest and discontent brought about by the Dreyfus case and its accompanying incidents, there is so much combustible matter lying about that we in Paris cannot but have a little apprehension lest a spark should produce a conflagration.[1]

In reply to various pleas which he regarded as appeals to fear Chamberlain prepared for the Cabinet a memorandum counselling firmness.[2] Before circulating it he seems to have struck out the following sentences but they contain his feeling:

Similar arguments would apply with even greater force to our

[1] Sir E. Monson to Lord Salisbury, January 14, 1898.

[2] Memorandum dated January 25, 1898.

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occupation of Egypt, and to our position in the East than to the West African question. If we have rights and interests in any quarter of the world and are unprepared to defend them, it is certain that foreign nations will know how to take advantage of our weakness.

Particularly he fought tooth and nail against Hanotaux's proposal to connect Dahomey with the Niger by a French corridor, a hundred miles long and thirty miles wide, across British territory.

After his memorandum had been discussed by his colleagues, the Colonial Secretary was able to write to his wife: "I have come back from the Cabinet where everything was decided as I wished, for the present at any rate. Possibly I may have to fight again, but it is all right so far."

The talk of war became more general. Chamberlain on February 8 read out two disquieting telegrams to the House of Commons. Between his sentences you might have heard a pin drop. The first was from the Governor of Lagos reporting that a squad of Senegalese had arrived at Boria, a position reached a few days earlier by our Haussas. The latter were summoned to haul down the British flag. On their refusal the Senegalese camped close by the town. This was the kind of incident that might lead to war. The second telegram was from the Governor of the Gold Coast and announced an encroachment in the hinterland of that Colony. Soon afterwards came worse messages. The French in some force had crossed the Niger and invaded those territories of the "Empire of Sokoto" which had been formally secured to Britain by the treaty with France in 1890. This was too much. Sir George Goldie instantly sent a rapid column to "compel the French" to "recross the Niger" adding that no attack was to be made "until after extremely courteous written summonses were refused".[1] Though he took this hardy step without instructions, he was in no danger of being thrown over. The British Cabinet were at one. Hanotaux disavowed the irruption into Sokoto.

A few days later Chamberlain, without a syllable that could embitter the situation, explained the reasons for raising the new West African Frontier Force—then being rapidly completed—

[1] Goldie to Selborne, February 21, 1898.

and was supported by an overwhelming majority of the House of Commons.[1] Sir Edward Grey recognised that the Colonial Secretary had not said one word to prejudice a peaceful solution and remarked pithily on the policy of the Government, "We know that they have no choice but to be firm".[2]

The strain did not relax. France was in the agonies of the Dreyfus affair. Zola had just been condemned following his terrible denunciation, *J'accuse*. From Paris the British ambassador, speaking for his British colleagues on the Niger Commission as well as for himself, sent the most sombre of all his dispatches.[3] He thought it very possible—and so thought other foreign diplomatists in Paris—that France in her abnormal mood might seek relief by rushing into war with England. The Committee of Defence had to face the possibilities of conflict. Spenser Wilkinson, then deservedly regarded as our ablest writer upon the relations between politics and defence, said to the Colonial Secretary: "If there is a war you will have to run it".[4]

Whatever Chamberlain might have been as War Minister on a great scale with full power, there was no flaw in his measures for reasserting the predominance of British power on the lower Niger and westwards through the Borgu region. Thanks to his own energy and to his choice of men, we were at last in a position not only to hold our own but to turn the tables on M. Hanotaux, should he persist in his method of competitive occupation.

VII

For by March 1898 the organisation of the West African Frontier Force was sufficiently completed. That dusky "New Model", with two battalions of infantry, two batteries of artillery and a company of engineers, was ready to move under the keen leadership of a commander who knew the country. Headquarters were to be at Jebba, distant from the sea 500 miles up-stream. It was a base with which the French had nothing to compare under the new conditions.

Lugard's operations were prompt. His second in command,

[1] House of Commons, February 24, 1898. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. liii. cols. 1617-1628.

[2] *Ibid.* cols. 1628-1630.

[3] February 26, 1898.

[4] Spenser Wilkinson to Chamberlain, March 2, 1898.

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Willcocks, started from the Niger westwards to Borgu, with orders to advance rapidly until he came into contact with the French outposts. He was to avoid all places where the tricolour was found flying and guarded by troops in uniform. Otherwise Willcocks at his discretion was to occupy towns or villages and hoist the Union Jack. This done he was to regard every position thus placed under the flag as British territory and to hold it at all costs. Above all things, he was not to be the first to fire if he could help it. But were he fired upon anywhere he was immediately to assert British authority throughout the whole of Borgu. With equal intrepidity and judgment Willcocks carried out these instructions, realising both the urgency of action and the gravity of the international issues. He took possession of post after post, but was careful wherever he hoisted the British flag to leave a British officer or non-commissioned officer in charge of his detachments.

Nikki and Kishi, Kiama and Boria—like Wa and Wagadugu far off in the Gold Coast hinterland—might become names dear to cynics, and also to a humorous democracy ready to fight, but each of them was a key to routes and regions. That age of Imperialism was a liberal education in geography.

In the area of dispute, at an increasing number of points the Union Jack and the tricolour now flew in sight of each other. The rank and file on both sides were native levies eager to prove their mettle. The existence of the officers was feverish, exacerbating. They were severed from ordinary communication with their Governments. We may well marvel again that the guns did not go off of themselves.

The most hazardous of all these predicaments is the best illustration. At one moment British and French troops confronted each other in the same village. Willcocks occupied on his main line of march a post called Betikuta. Under cloud of night the French brought up a Senegalese contingent and ran up the tricolour within four hundred yards of our flag and our men. It was a test of our repute in Borgu, and in the minds of our own native soldiers. Willcocks instantly sent a message to the officer in superior local command at a much more important place taken by the French, Kiama. The message was to the effect that if the tricolour were not immediately withdrawn

from before Betikuta, the Union Jack would be hoisted in front of the larger town. The warning was unheeded. Willcocks marched to Kiama, displayed the British flag at its gates, and was thoroughly prepared to meet the attack which he now thought inevitable. Happily no opposition was offered. The French officer recognised that his own challenge at Betikuta had provoked the British retaliation and confined himself to verbal protest.

As it happened this was the last episode in the state of "suspended war" which had prevailed for nine months. Two hours after the armed truce was arranged at Kiama arrived the great news that a complete West African settlement had been concluded between the two powers. Peril was past on the Niger, whatever might yet happen on the Nile.

VIII

The negotiations in Paris had been difficult and critical to the last. Our neighbours did not go mad as the British ambassador had feared; yet the Niger Commission debated from the late autumn of 1897 to the summer of 1898 without reaching any assurance of a peaceable agreement.

For this reason amongst others yet to appear, Chamberlain in May excited public opinion at home and startled other nations by the "long-spoon speech" as it was called from a single sentence referring to Russia.[1] That speech chiefly belongs to a further chapter. It filled the French press like no utterance for very many years; certainly like none since Bismarck's time.

Parisian journalists like many Opposition organs at home adopted an ingenious device henceforth familiar. Between Salisbury and Chamberlain not only political variance but personal antagonism was assumed to exist. The latter suggestion was baseless; the former partly true. With the usual exaggeration of contemporary polemics the Colonial Secretary was pictured by his Opposition assailants as a malign war-monger straining at the leash held by a wise and heavy Prime Minister pulling backwards. The "long-spoon" speech was represented by the *Journal des Débats* as a usurper's veiled attack on Salisbury:

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, May 13, 1898.

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"Never did a disrespectful nephew speak in more detached terms of an uncle whose property he expects to inherit". The Parisian press generally figured Chamberlain as nothing less than the ogre of British egotism. The truth is that as Colonial Secretary he had to defend his trust. No aggressive initiative of his created the problem he had to face. Its origin dated from long before he returned to office. He did not give provocation, but met it and repelled it. No historical student suggests to-day that Hanotaux was not the challenger.

None the less, between the Prime Minister and his redoubtable colleague the divergence of feeling on foreign policy was marked at this time. Here we must limit ourselves to the bearing upon West Africa of this contrast of temperaments.

The Niger Commission, which had argued at intervals through more than two years, seemed on the eve of full agreement. At the eleventh hour there was another hitch. On June 1 M. Hanotaux sent for the British ambassador and said he desired to make a personal appeal for the relinquishment by Britain of a point on which French feeling insisted. The point was Ilo, where a young French officer had been assassinated. But the place had much more than a sentimental value. Situated well above the Bussa rapids, it was accordingly a centre of trade-routes on both sides of the Niger.

At first the Prime Minister had declined to accept what he regarded as an unjustifiable demand sprung at the last moment. But Monson telegraphed "Fate of negotiations hangs on Ilo". Hanotaux declared categorically that it was "impossible" for him to give it up.[1] Salisbury believed this. Not so Chamberlain. Letters between Prime Minister and Colonial Secretary are as expressive as anything in their long-continued but never profuse correspondence. Despite their scrupulously courteous relations we see the wide difference between these two characters. Chamberlain will not yield another inch on the Niger.

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

June 2, 1898.— . . . I think we have come to a critical point in the West African negotiations and must consider our further course carefully. . . . I cannot find that we have any claim to Ilo by treaty *eo nomine*. . . .

[1] *British Documents*, vol. i. p. 155.

On the other hand Lugard's telegram (received by me this morning) of the 31st May is very grave. It means that we cannot take any measures for meeting the French concentration at Ilo, without finding ourselves at war with Gando and Sokoto. It will be a war in which we shall be very far removed from our base and in which we shall have to meet the two most powerful principalities of those regions. We know so little about those countries that we cannot discern what sort of difficulty it will be that this contingency will open to us—but it may be very grave and its cost will certainly buy out the value of Ilo a hundred times over. I say nothing about the quarrel with the French—for that is familiar ground. I therefore should confidently counsel the abandonment of Ilo. . . . The decision of yesterday in the French Chamber seems to me to lend considerable urgency to this view.[1]

To Chamberlain this skilful letter was a counsel of weakness, and further he judged it a mistaken estimate of the practical position. Ilo was far south of the line he had at first hoped to recover. As he saw it we had already surrendered over a hundred miles of river supposed in 1890 to have been yielded by France. Again and again while stating his personal view in various matters he had repeated his readiness to defer to the Prime Minister's view, but now he had come to his limit:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

June 2, 1898.— . . . I have very anxiously considered your letter, as I feel that a wrong decision may lead to momentous consequences. . . .

I cannot agree with you that the cession of Ilo would not be a climb-down.

From the first the Colonial Office have always attached the greatest importance to the retention of this place. . . .

As regards the future it is becoming clear that the so-called empire of Sokoto is in a state of dissolution like that of the Great Mogul in the time of Clive. I imagine that in accordance with that precedent a small European force, with perhaps Indian auxiliaries and modern armaments will be able to establish our authority, but we shall have a very great responsibility for the future government of this vast country. . . .

[1] Monsieur Paul Deschanel, representing a more nationalist policy than his Radical predecessor, had been designated by a preliminary vote, though by the narrowest of majorities, President of the new French Chamber.

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Although, therefore, I am most anxious to meet your wishes, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that I have gone to the extreme limit to which, as specially charged with these interests, I am entitled to go, and that on the side of the Niger at any rate, I could not defend any further surrender.

As to Bona[1]—which you will remember you were told on the authority of the French Commissioners a fortnight ago was the only obstacle to a settlement—I am ready to give way. . . .

I think that we shall not be the greatest losers even if the present negotiations fall through. In that case I hope we may take steps to put ourselves in a better position before they are resumed. There is no reason why we should not follow the example of the French and occupy places in *their* hinterland which would give us something to exchange when they are tired of the danger and expense of the present situation. . . .

At this the Prime Minister perceives that he cannot cede Ilo, though totally unconvinced of its value, but the old "Saturday Reviewer" appears in a very pretty passage of art ironical; refuted some years after by events that showed Chamberlain the better prophet though he had the blunter style:

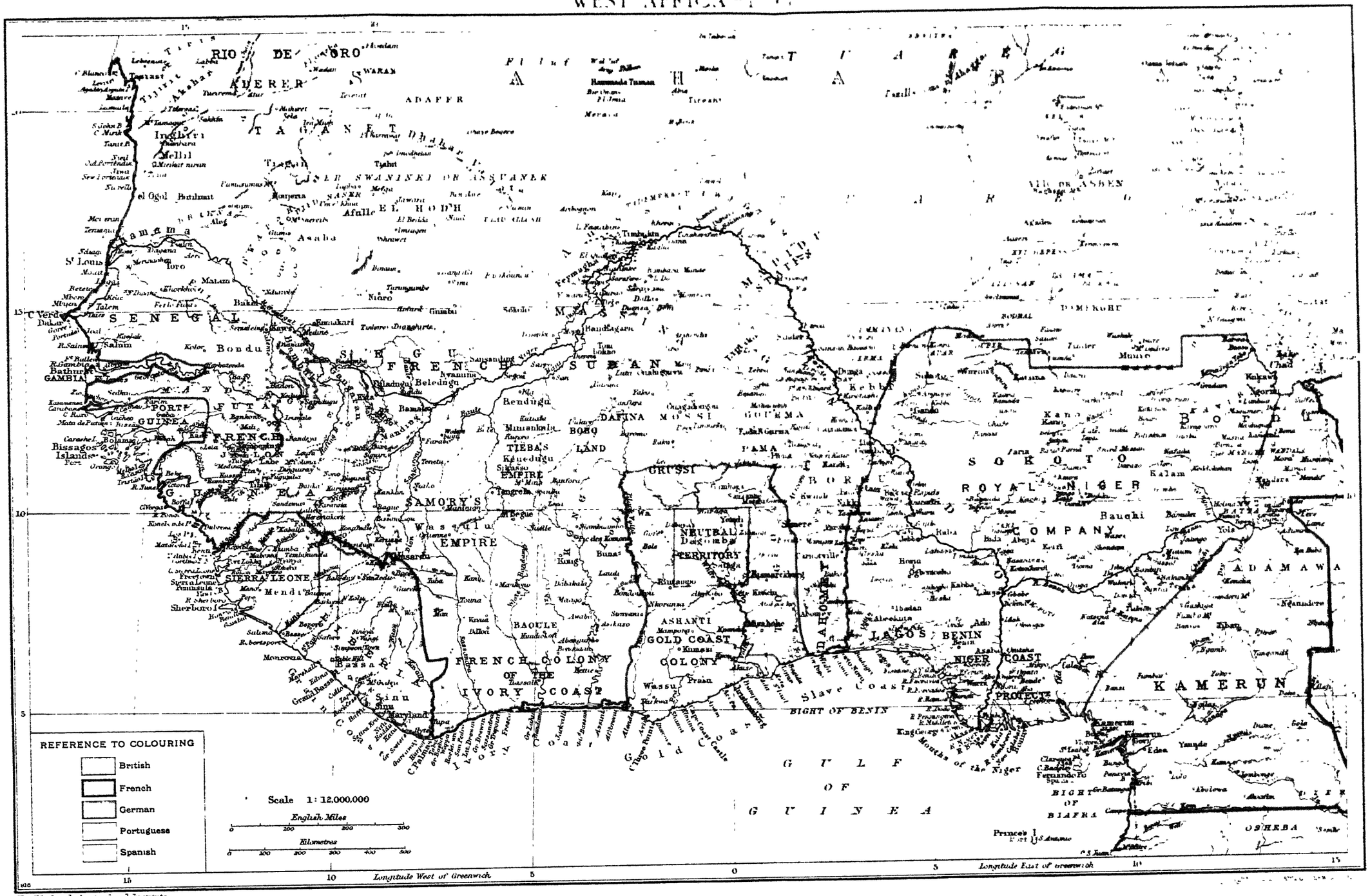
SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

June 3, 1898.— . . . I am wholly unconvinced of the value of Ilo; and I cannot discover on what our claim to it rests. But I should prefer giving up Bona to giving up Ilo because our title to Bona seems to me positively bad. It will be a pity if we break off the negotiations, for it will add to our difficulties in the Nile Valley. . . . If we are to send British or Indian troops in the hope of fighting another Plassey with Lugard as our Clive and Sokoto as our Bengal, the prospect becomes very much more serious. Our Clive will be in no danger of being astonished at his own moderation. There is no loot to get except in Goldie's dreams. If you wish to come to terms it would be prudent to do so before we take Khartum. We shall get nothing out of the French Assembly after that event.

The Colonial Secretary was not thinking in the least of pro-consular pomps, but only of a constructive policy which in a few years under happier auspices did in truth create an African

[1] Bona, far away from the Niger, was a town and district near our Gold Coast hinterland but to which the French had the better claim.

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Bengal. Content with carrying his final stipulation on the Niger at the price of conceding a minor claim in the Gold Coast hinterland, he drily replied:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

June 3, 1898.— . . . In this difficult business I desire to meet you by giving up everything that does not appear to me essential to our honour and our interests. Ilo is in my opinion one of the exceptions—Bona is not. If I were alone concerned I would not give up either. . . . Please remember in making this offer, that until a week ago the French called for Bona *or* Ilo. We are now, therefore, giving them what they asked for—they ought to be content. It is more than I am—except that I am glad to meet your wishes.

Lord Salisbury now explained to Paris that Ilo could not be given up but he offered good compensation on the other side of the disputed hinterlands. At last, Hanotaux consented to settle.[1]

IX

The Anglo-French Convention was signed on June 14, 1898. The British ambassador at Paris, in a fevered atmosphere, had often dreaded the worst. Now he congratulated Her Majesty's Ministers upon their success "in obtaining that, which at the outset, it appeared impossible, or at the least supremely improbable would ever be recognised as theirs".[2] The full details are not for recapitulation here.[3]

We may note the curious contrast between the personal fortunes of the two chief antagonists. On the day following the signature of the Convention, though not for that reason, the Méline Cabinet, which had lasted for more than two years, longer than any preceding Cabinet under the Third Republic, was overthrown. M. Hanotaux never again held high office, though he enriched literature instead. He was superseded, with an ultimate effect memorable now but then wholly unsuspected, by M. Delcassé.

For Chamberlain the last phase of these transactions had been

[1] June 8. *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. i. p. 156.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 157. Sir E. Monson to Lord Salisbury, June 15, 1898.

[3] Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, vol. ii. pp. 785-796.

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trying. Official papers pursued him everywhere day and night. When he pays an overdue visit to the Royal Academy to see Sargent's portraits—they were the talk of that season—a messenger appears with an urgent red-labelled dispatch-box. To find a corner where he can open it he has to retreat under all eyes. In the following week he was pulled out of bed by a dispatch-box reaching Highbury after midnight, and containing nothing less than Salisbury's proposition to cede Ilo. The long answer we have noted had to be written at once.

On a happy day when the agreement was on the point of signature in Paris, Mr. Haldane, who had recently visited Highbury, where he talked of Dr. Johnson and his haunts, gave a luncheon for the Colonial Secretary and his wife at the old "Cheshire Cheese". Mr. and Mrs. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Birrell were of the party. The newspapers buzzed with this genial meeting, in their own Fleet Street, between Chamberlain and these leaders of the Opposition. For a moment Dr. Johnson's chop-house became a tabernacle of peace for politicians.

The Anglo-French Convention of 1898 was worthy of two great nations. To a degree rare in any instrument of this kind, concluding a dispute so complicated and embittered, honour and interest were satisfied on both sides. M. Hanotaux himself writes justly that it united three great regions—Algeria and Tunis, Senegal and Niger, Lake Chad and the Congo—and ensured the territorial unification of that immense African dominion which without interruption stretches under the tricolour for wellnigh 3000 miles southward from Algiers to the Congo, and for nearly as far westward from the Atlantic to the desert border of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.[1] Further, our neighbours obtained on our part of the Niger the lease of two trading depots. Another article secured for thirty years the equal commercial treatment of British and French subjects in the larger part of the respective territories.

On the other hand, Britain gained the bulk of the territory disputed for two years, and every main object contended for by the Colonial Secretary.

The French contingents evacuated their positions along the Niger itself from Ilo to Bussa, and the river became British on

[1] Hanotaux, *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, p. 123.

both banks for seven hundred miles from Ilo to the sea. Westwards of the river most of the territory where British and French forces had stood so perilously face to face was recovered. Eastwards, on the other side of the Niger, British sovereignty was confirmed with respect to the whole "Empire of Sokoto" and all its Haussa States, including the city of Kano, with its massive walls and many gates, by far the largest manufacturing and commercial centre in all that part of the Sudan. Not for a moment must all the credit be claimed for Chamberlain at the expense of his Ministerial colleagues, but to his unfaltering nerve, steady shrewdness of perception, and energy in creating the West African Frontier Force most was due.

The Nigeria of to-day contains by itself a population very far exceeding the total for French West Africa and considerably more than double that of the Belgian Congo. In the sequel, his organisation of Nigeria was to be in its way an achievement second to nothing in Chamberlain's career or the career of any single statesman of the nineteenth century in the field of Colonial policy.

Chief trustee for the interests of the British Empire in this litigation, it was his duty to do his utmost for its cause. The French to a man were certain to do their best for their own country. Against the Foreign Office and the Paris Embassy he had been right in his judgment of what discriminating firmness could maintain and obtain without war. But he felt that the policy of presenting Britain with "accomplished facts" would reappear on the Nile; and he held that in face of the Continental alliances our former comfortable tradition of detachment would have to be revised one way or the other unless war indeed and with disaster were some day to ensue.

CHAPTER LVI

FASHODA—CHAMBERLAIN AND THE NILE SETTLEMENT

(1898–1899)

CHAMBERLAIN, Hanotaux and Kitchener—Another Visit to America—News of Fashoda in New York—Ministers and the Crisis—A Day of Relief—Danger Continued and Increased—French Claims in the Nile Valley—Is War only Postponed?—Chamberlain and Salisbury through Foreign Eyes—Chamberlain's Manchester Speeches—The French Press on "The Living Incarnation of England"—Settlement at Last—The Demarcation of the Spheres—Footnotes to History.

I

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AFTER the Niger the Nile. When one Great Power pursues a policy of confronting another Great Power with accomplished facts war will come of it at last, unless one side or the other gives way. Arising out of the French "grand design" a second and more fateful African crisis was already impending. The Colonial Secretary's part may be shortly narrated, yet the episode is of no secondary importance. It continues the comparative study of Salisbury and Chamberlain as seen through foreign eyes. Fallacious as was the general estimate abroad of the relations between the two men, it entered into the *imponderabilia*, and had its influence on events.

Less than four weeks after the West African settlement was signed at the Quai d'Orsay, Captain Marchand completed his epic journey from the Congo to the White Nile. Appearing on that river with his pathetic flotilla and his handful of men, eight officers and 120 Senegalese, he ran up the tricolour over the old government buildings amidst wide marshes at the desolate spot called Fashoda. Kitchener, after his victory on the Atbara, was preparing hard for his advance on Khartum. When he came

to ascend the river beyond and discover the French flag, lonely but defiant, the Fashoda quarrel would explode in the manner long foreseen on the British side.

To Chamberlain this question, when it arose, would be no new topic. As early as 1894 he had been warned by Captain Lugard and others of what was likely to happen one day. Cherished already in French colonial circles was then the perilous plan of advancing along the tributaries of the Congo and then, by relatively short though arduous marching and porterage, reaching the Bahr-el-Ghazal and so the main Nile. In the following year Sir Edward Grey gave his almost unprecedented warning that the appearance of a French mission upon the Upper Nile would be regarded by the British Government as an "unfriendly act". That pronouncement necessarily became the text of the Unionist Government.

They could not be weaker if they would, and they would not if they could. Chamberlain held it to be impossible for any British Government to swerve one hair's breadth from a position formulated in the most serious terms, short of an ultimatum, known to diplomacy. Not only so. On the Lower Niger he had organised counteraction by Lugard's "Waffs", and recovered the advantage. Penetration by a French mission into any part of the Nile basin would be far more menacing. There could be no question of partition, as on the Niger. There would be no room for any kind of territorial compromise. The naked alternatives would be withdrawal or war.

II

Here again we must look at the case through French eyes. We saw that after the Italian disaster at Adowa, Kitchener's advance on Dongola was authorised in March 1896. At the end of the following month Hanotaux returned to office as Foreign Minister. One of the first questions for the newly formed Méline Cabinet was whether Marchand's mission should be revoked or confirmed. "It was impossible to foresee at that time", says M. Hanotaux, "the construction of a railway which despite the desert and the cataracts would become in the sequel the instrument of Anglo-Egyptian victory over Mahdism." In the mind of

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the French Foreign Minister and his colleagues the Nile plan was inseparable from the scheme of intensive occupation in the hinterlands within the bend of the Niger. His idea, he reiterates, was to force England to a general settlement. It was resolved to risk pacific penetration into the Mahdist Sudan so that all concurrent efforts should be "crowned by establishing ourselves in the basin of the Nile". Final instructions to this effect were signed on June 23, 1896, and two days later Marchand sailed from France for the Congo.[1]

Two years later, in the summer of 1898, that affair and that method were near the explosion. Hanotaux had just quitted office but left his legacy. He had worked to the last on the theory that though the British Cabinet was "dominated too often by the impetuous self-assurance of Mr. Chamberlain", Lord Salisbury and the British Government as a whole would make large concessions on the Nile as on the Niger, when confronted with yet another accomplished fact and the most daring of all. There could not have been a more superficial estimate.

M. Hanotaux never understood, until too late, that there was no substantial difference whatever between Salisbury and Chamberlain on the main issue raised by the "unfriendly act"; that the solidity of the Unionist Cabinet was absolute; that most of the Opposition leaders were of the same mind; and that for all main purposes the whole British nation would be unanimous and inexorable.

With startling suddenness these realities were revealed. Kitchener destroyed the Mahdist army at Omdurman on Friday, September 2, 1898. On the Sunday the British and Egyptian flags were hoisted over the palace at Khartum, and a moving service was held in Gordon's memory. On the Wednesday after, one of the Khalifa's steamers returning down-stream surrendered at Omdurman, and reported the presence at Fashoda of a force under white command. The force must be Marchand's. This news was published in London and Paris on Saturday, September 10.

The crisis between Britain and France arose at once, though not diplomatically confessed until rumour was confirmed a fortnight later. From that, six months of extreme tension passed

[1] Hanotaux, *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, pp. 105-109; and André Lebon, *La Politique de la France en Afrique*, 1896–1898, pp. 12-22.

before a peaceful solution was thoroughly assured. It is seldom realised in our day that Fashoda itself was a straw. There was vastly more at stake between the Congo and the Nile.

III

The Colonial Secretary was on the high seas when the battle of Omdurman was fought. Just before, at the end of August, he had left England with his wife to spend a few weeks with her parents in America.

On his arrival at New York the interviewers informed him of the recapture of Khartum. He said to one American reporter: "That settles it for all time. Gordon is avenged. . . . Young man, you will live to see the time when a railroad will be built through that country to the great lakes, the Transvaal and the Cape."[1] Cabled home, these remarks answered to the nation's mood both of memory and of expectation. But in another forty-eight hours or so intelligence of another kind came to the quiet farm at Danvers. The French were almost certainly at Fashoda. Chamberlain did not break his holiday. There was no need. For all the width of the Atlantic he felt in the surest touch with opinion at home, and knew that the strength of the national uprising would be like nothing of its kind known for more than a generation. The country was far more a solid block in determination than when Beaconsfield made his stand on the Eastern question. This was a crisis that democracy could understand.

For once, it could not be said of the Colonial Secretary that he was foremost in bringing fuel to a blaze. For weeks orators were in front of him. Of many speeches at home while he was on the other side of the Atlantic one may be taken as typical. Lord Rosebery led national opinion in a thrilling strain of prescience:

> If the nations of the world are under the impression that the ancient spirit of Great Britain is dead or that her resources are weakened or her population less determined than ever it was to maintain the rights and honour of its flag, they make a mistake which can only end in a disastrous conflagration.[2]

[1] *The Times*, September 9, 1898: "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain has arrived in New York on board the steamer *Majestic*. Elaborate accounts of interviews with him appear in this morning's (September 8) newspapers. . . ."

[2] Epsom, October 12, 1898.

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A week after this Chamberlain returned to England. Plunging into an accumulation of diplomatic papers, as well as into all the arrears of Colonial Office business, he saw at once that Fashoda itself was a puny matter. The true issue was far wider. It was raised by the French claim to establish themselves in the immense province of the Bahr-el-Ghazal and so to join up their Congo possessions with the Nile and with Abyssinia. He read Kitchener's account of his meeting with Marchand. That gallant Frenchman, who won everyone's admiration and liking, had been saved from destruction at the hands of the dervishes by the arrival of the British; but he still maintained, and meant it, that he and his troops would die at their posts rather than haul down the tricolour; and for months afterwards he hoped to retain for France the chain of posts he had left behind him in the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

Chamberlain underscored with satisfaction one passage in Salisbury's dispatch to Cairo on October 1: "I request that you will inform the Sirdar that it has become clear that the French Government will not instruct M. Marchand to leave Fashoda. They expect that Her Majesty's Government will purchase his departure by large concessions of territory. *This Her Majesty's Government will not do.*"[1]

On November 4, at the Mansion House dinner in honour of Lord Kitchener, the Prime Minister announced the French ambassador's assurance, the same afternoon, that Marchand would be instructed to retire from his hopeless post. Otherwise the crisis remained as grave as ever and was even accentuated. For months longer the French Government clung to its case for a right of way, along Marchand's route, from the Congo to the Nile.

On this larger question Chamberlain's mind was concentrated. To concession in that sense he was inflexibly opposed, just as he had been earlier in the year to the idea of a long French corridor across British territory from Dahomey to the Niger. He, and some of his colleagues, were a little anxious—whether with real cause the Chamberlain papers do not show—lest the Prime Minister might weaken on the larger issue. We had to insist on

[1] *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, 1898–1914, vol. i. p. 172. The italics mark the words underscored by Chamberlain.

a total and final separation between the British and the French spheres by making the watershed between the Congo basin and the Nile basin a line of demarcation to be asserted at all costs. CHAP. LVI. ÆT. 62.

Upon the inwardness of the Ministerial situation a side-light is thrown by a letter from Lord Curzon. That rising hope of young Conservatism had just received magnificent promotion for a man of his age. Viceroy-elect, he was about to leave London for India. In his former position as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs he had acquired in his way an exhaustive knowledge of the African imbroglio. Now, before quitting the scene at home—which he was not to re-enter until domestic and foreign politics alike had been revolutionised—he entreats the Colonial Secretary to stand fast:

CURZON TO CHAMBERLAIN

Carlton Club, October 26, 1898.— . . . I hope that the Government will in no circumstances admit of French access by a French river through French territory, past a French enclave, to the Nile. Their ships and commerce, like those of all nations, can go up and down a British or Anglo-Egyptian river. But they have no more claim to an enclave on the Nile than the Russians have to one on the Indus, and they have no more right to access to the Nile by a French river (for I suppose they want the Bahr-el-Ghazal to be French) than we have to access by a British river to the Upper Congo.

Their object in seizing Fashoda, which is in itself worthless, was to get a *débouché* on the Nile. If we grant it to them they will have gained their object; and in touch with Abyssinia they will give us infinite trouble in the future.

Wherever we draw the frontier I do hope—no French flag, territory or men anywhere near the Nile. Excuse this letter, but I am now outside the show, and can enjoy the license, as well as suffer from the ignorance of the layman.[1]

One reference in this letter hits the nail on the head. We now know that the British Government's view of the real scope of

[1] On receiving this letter Chamberlain wrote (October 27) to Lansdowne, who shared his apprehension: "My mind is uneasy about the Bahr-el-Ghazal. Heaven save us from enclaves! Either they would be worthless to the French or injurious to us. . . . I am pretty certain that this country will stand no more graceful concessions. So says all my correspondence, which has hitherto been a fair index of public opinion."

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Hanotaux's "grand design" was justified to the full. The original calculation was that Marchand, when he reached Fashoda, would join hands with a powerful Abyssinian force expected by that time to have conquered a wide region along the opposite bank of the Nile. To this end a treaty of alliance had been concluded with the Emperor Menelek.[1] This plan of a Franco-Abyssinian junction on the Upper Nile had failed for the moment; but it might revive were British statesmanship weak enough.

Against anything conducing to that possibility Chamberlain was adamant. With him in this conviction were not only the Duke of Devonshire, Sir Michael Hicks Beach and other colleagues, but Lord Rosebery, Sir Edward Grey and other Liberal leaders, including as we shall see Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. There is, we must repeat, nothing whatever in all the Chamberlain papers belonging to this period to show that Lord Salisbury was not of the same mind at bottom. But the studied consideration of his diplomatic language led the Quai d'Orsay to hope that he would ultimately make some substantial concession. That vain hope protracted the crisis.

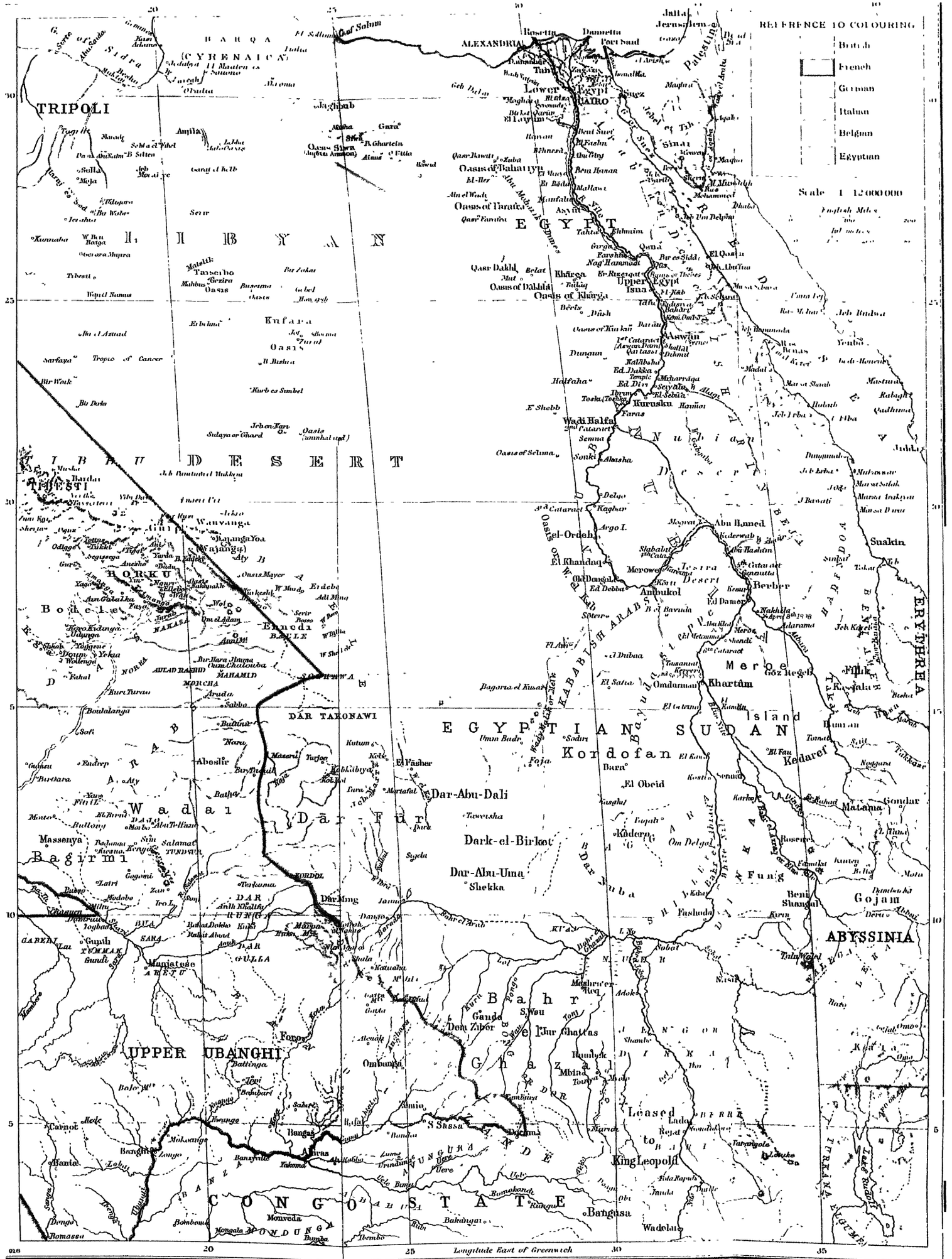
Meanwhile on both sides of the Channel intensive preparations for the event of war went on night and day. But France was isolated. Neither her ally Russia nor Germany, her opportunist partner in a very fugitive flirtation, would lift a finger to help her in this bitter plight.

IV

We have looked at this predicament through French eyes. We must now look at it through German eyes which were watching Chamberlain. This brings us to one of the most curious passages in this biography. Since the publication after the World War of the Reich's archives, this episode has been supposed by many students in all countries to convict him of sheer truculence in this business. Let us see.

The German accounts of the situation in London and Paris contain some of the liveliest pictures of the day. The Kaiser's naval attaché in this country reported to Berlin that British

[1] Hanotaux, *Le Partage de l'Afrique*, pp. 132-135; and André Lebon, *La Politique de la France en Afrique*, 1896–1898, pp. 32-40.



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naval preparations, though quiet, were remarkably advanced, and that some authoritative persons, notably Chamberlain and Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty, were not disinclined to force hostilities with France.[1]

It was apparently desired to obtain some more direct account of the Colonial Secretary's mind. Baron von Eckardstein—a confidential agent, of whom we shall hear much more—asked the Colonial Secretary for an interview. The conversation was arranged for the morning of November 4, when the French decision to abandon Fashoda was known, though not officially announced until some hours after this meeting took place. Chamberlain must have spoken with that volcanic candour in private talk which often exhilarated and staggered his listeners. There is no positive proof that Eckardstein in person made himself a reporter of confidences. We only know that on the same day a long letter paraphrasing an interview with the Colonial Secretary was sent by someone, anonymous in the German records, to Count Metternich, afterwards German ambassador in London but then Prussia's envoy to the free city of Hamburg. Already for many years he had been intimately acquainted with English affairs, and he forwarded to the Wilhelmstrasse his unnamed correspondent's version of Chamberlain's remarks. This report made an exaggerated impression on the mind of Kaiser Wilhelm, who sought to use it most mischievously in his unscrupulous private letters to the young Tsar, who was by no means quite the pliable simpleton that the cleverer sovereign assumed. Count Metternich's informant essays to write in English, but not all of it is like Chamberlain's English:

CHAMBERLAIN AND FRANCE

November 4, 1898.—*Mr. Chamberlain said:* There are very few people who realise the gravity of the present situation. England is a peaceful, commercial nation and has as far as yet always managed to avoid war. We have however arrived at a point where our patience is over, and public opinion is tired of so-called gracious concessions.[2]

I do believe that France will evacuate Fashoda, but that will not

[1] *Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 380-381, October 25, 1898.

[2] "Graceful concessions" was the colloquial English word. This little error shows that the letter was by a German hand.

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settle the question, as France is certain to refuse to go out of the Bahr-el-Ghazal. France will try to play there the same trick as she recently did in West Africa and before in Madagascar, Tunis and Siam. The time has come where England and France have to settle all their differences once and for ever.[1] In fact the English nation is in a mood where she [*sic*] will rather fight than give in a single iota. I as well as my colleagues are perfectly aware of the fact that giving in even an iota would mean the upset of the present government.

Asked whether Lord Salisbury would take a resolute line, the Colonial Secretary is represented as replying in the strictest confidence:

I am afraid Lord Salisbury himself has not got the strength of mind to bring about the necessary crisis and choose the right moment to strike like Bismarck did at Ems. You may be certain, however, that all my colleagues, even Mr. Arthur Balfour, are of the same opinion as I am namely that Lord Salisbury's policy "peace at any price" cannot go on any longer and that England has to show to the whole world that she *can act*. I consider that the present moment is very favourable for us and you will see what is going to happen as soon as our war preparations are finished.

To Eckardstein's question, "whether they meant to kick up a row", Chamberlain answered:

Certainly not, as I told you before we are a peaceful, commercial nation, but as soon as we are ready we shall present our bill to France *not only in Egypt* but all over the globe, and should she refuse to pay, *then war*. Christmas may pass over quietly but what will happen in January or February nobody can foretell.[2]

The Colonial Secretary went on to give his emphatic opinion that Russia would not and could not interfere.

This version, apart from its clumsy paraphrases, is coloured by the mind of the writer, but it is not consciously dishonest. Chamberlain believes that "France is certain to refuse to go out of the Bahr-el-Ghazal". That refusal would mean war and could not mean anything else. To say this, was not a threat but a

[1] Kaiser's marginal comment: "Completely right from the British standpoint" (*Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 389).

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 388.

truism. Both nations were arming to the teeth. If it came to war there would have to be at the end of it a settlement of our quarrels with France in all quarters—in Siam, Madagascar, Newfoundland, Australasia, as well as in equatorial Africa and Egypt. These contentions had given far more trouble to the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office than all other difficulties.

V

Chamberlain up to the late autumn of 1898 had not been heard upon a political platform for six months. He was engaged to speak at Manchester in November and he meant to speak out.

At a dense meeting in the Free Trade Hall he paid a high tribute to the French people, but attacked the system of pressure and prodding which for several years had been ceaselessly pursued by French Ministers at every single point in the world where the two nations came into touch. He denounced a "policy of pin-pricks".[1] But the main point he meant to drive home was that not only Fashoda but all the posts that Marchand had left behind him in the Bahr-el-Ghazal must be renounced. "Fashoda is only a symbol: the great issue is the control of the whole valley of the Nile."[2]

This and other speeches in Manchester aroused stormy enthusiasm. They were attacked at home by those who hated the man and all he said and did, and they were criticised by some others.

France, needless to say, was touched on the raw when her situation was already painful enough. Her press was furious. But language as blunt was used by other British statesmen. There is one surprising comparison. Take Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman himself. Speaking at Stirling a very few days later even he, of all men, went beyond Chamberlain in denouncing what was in truth the worst feature of M. Hanotaux's projects.

> The very same set of men who had instigated the Fashoda expedition were back in the East [of Africa] plotting and contriving with the assistance of one or two Russian emissaries to induce the Abyssinian monarch

[1] This phrase had been suggested by a Paris newspaper, the *Matin*.
[2] Manchester, November 15, 1898.

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to come down from his mountains with his warlike hordes . . . into the Nile valley in order to meet and encounter and defeat or thwart the object of the British and Egyptian soldiers, who were moving up the valley for the purpose of rescuing the whole country from savagedom and of restoring order and decent government. Could any one wonder that with a knowledge of this giant manœuvre . . . even the quietest amongst us were filled with hot indignation and that we ranged ourselves as one man in determining to resist the aggression.[1]

Departing from diplomatic usage, our ambassador to France took up the Colonial Secretary's text in an address at the annual banquet of the British Chamber of Commerce in Paris. Appealing to French politicians and the French press alike, Sir Edmund Monson said: "I would earnestly ask them to abstain from the continuance of a policy of pin-pricks which, while it can only procure an ephemeral gratification to a short-lived Ministry, must inevitably perpetuate across the Channel an irritation which a high-spirited nation must eventually feel to be intolerable".[2]

Throughout Europe the Colonial Secretary stood out more strongly than ever as a potent figure in the world. Exaggerated comment in many capitals represented him as the master of the British Cabinet. The *Liberté*, drawing its inspiration at that time from high sources, displayed the continental obsession in an article singularly characteristic of the time:

Mr. Chamberlain, renegade Radical, sexagenarian dandy, a little ridiculous—a little odious even under certain aspects—is nevertheless a master-man and a statesman; and he possesses over many of those of his contemporaries who hold foremost places to-day on the world's stage, the inestimable advantage of knowing what he wants, of saying it, and of doing it when he can. . . . The reality is the speech of Mr. Chamberlain, who has once again put in the pocket of his correct frock-coat the powerful and corpulent Marquis of Salisbury. . . . Mr. Chamberlain remains more than ever the authorised representative, the living incarnation of the new England, or rather of Greater Britain.[3]

We cannot understand history merely by looking backwards in the light of assured knowledge. Always, we must place our-

[1] *The Times*, November, 25, 1898.
[2] December 6, 1898.
[3] November 17, 1898. Quoted from the Paris correspondence in *The Times* of November 18.

selves at the standpoint of statesmen in their day, who look forward to the uncertainties of the future and know not what to-morrow may bring forth.

VI

Through the winter of 1898, and up to the spring of 1899, anxiety remained at a stretch and arming continued. M. Delcassé told the British ambassador "very deliberately" that if France had to go to war with England "he was convinced that the rival commercial interests of Germany and England would strongly dispose the former to identify her action with that of Russia and France for the purpose of destroying England's maritime and commercial superiority".[1]

The claim to a French right of way from the Congo to the Nile was not yet withdrawn. Chamberlain's mind received lively illumination by a private letter from the Sudan. It was written to his lifelong friend Admiral Maxse by the latter's son Ivor,[2] who was then with Marchand, and gave an instructive as well as delightful account of that knight-errant's personality and views. "He is a good talker with a charming frank expression, and he looks you straight in the face and gives me the impression of being endowed with a singularly honest mind." But he still expected France to keep a strong footing in the Bahr-el-Ghazal.[3]

Diplomatic gossip everywhere was busy with speculation on the relations between Salisbury and Chamberlain. Count Deym, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in London, believed himself entitled to assert that the Prime Minister would have been somewhat more obliging towards France but for the definite opposition of his colleagues, especially Chamberlain and the Duke of Devonshire.[4] A couple of days later Hatzfeldt derives a similar impression. "Lord Salisbury, without directly saying so, clearly conveyed by glances and manner that in Chamberlain he has to

[1] *British Documents*, vol. i. p. 196 (Monson to Salisbury, December 9, 1898).

[2] Now General Sir Ivor Maxse.

[3] This letter, dated December 2, 1898, and written from a point near Fashoda, was printed in January 1899 for the use of the Foreign Office.

[4] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 402-403 (Hatzfeldt to the Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, December 20, 1898). "The old Gallic fox" is William II.'s marginal remark regarding Salisbury.

BOOK XII. 1899.

deal with a headlong man who knows neither moderation nor restraint, who rushes at whatever he desires in politics, and is hard to hold."[1] So elaborate and crude were the psychological deductions suggested to a good Teutonic mind on this occasion by Burleigh's nod. It is unpleasant but true to say that the German Emperor eagerly hoped that Britain and France would come to blows. They would sink each other's ships just at the apt moment when he was planning in earnest to increase the number of his own. "His Majesty considered that the danger was by no means past, and that it was probable that war would break out in the spring. . . . England . . . would have an excellent opportunity of settling accounts with France without any fear of the interference of other Powers, and it was doubtful whether so favourable a combination for England would ever again recur."[2]

Up to the very eve of settlement the British ambassador in Paris thought war more likely than not; the shrewd German ambassador there, Count Münster, thought it inevitable.[3] Then in mid-February M. Delcassé relinquished the desperate policy of keeping the French flag flying in the Bahr-el-Ghazal region of the Nile.[4] On March 21, 1899, six months after the great crisis began at Fashoda, the Anglo-French Convention was happily signed. About purely commercial facilities for France there never had been any difficulty. The watershed between the Congo and the Nile basins became the line of political demarcation.[5] The German Emperor still held that a sentimental Salisbury had let slip a finer opportunity of profitable war than Britain could recover in the future.[6]

VII

In Paris for a long time to come England was hated more than Germany ever had been. After Fashoda serious journals and ex-Ministers in France were proclaiming that England must be

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 405, December 22, 1898.

[2] December 19, 1898, German Emperor in conversation with Sir Frank Lascelles at Potsdam.

[3] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 200-201 (Monson to Salisbury, February 3, 1899).

[4] *Ibid.* p. 201 (Salisbury to Monson, February 15).

[5] Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, vol. ii. pp. 796-797.

[6] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 425.

destroyed by the novel and deadly weapon of the submarine. The theory was identical on paper with the method applied by Germany nearly twenty years afterwards.[1]

But in all the northern half of the African continent on both sides the whole scene was almost magically changed. The diplomatic tangles were straightened out. The competitive expeditions and daily perils of the year before disappeared. The West African question was settled. On the Niger, the best, though not the larger, part had been secured by Britain. On the other side of that continent the entire Nile basin from the equatorial lakes to the Mediterranean had become in effect part of the British Empire. In that achievement by a firm judgment of what could be gained without war, the Colonial Minister had taken no small share. He had not carried aggression into the territorial sphere of any country. He had to take his part as a British Minister and national leader in meeting encroachment on all sides. His policy was essentially though actively defensive, and it could not have been efficient had he shrunk from the necessary risks. It was impossible that he could be popular abroad, but the powerful impression he stamped upon foreign opinion did much to restore the due repute and influence of Britain in the world's matters.

[1] There are few more curious passages known in diplomatic correspondence than a contemporary note by Count Münster, the genial and witty German ambassador in Paris: "The French are children; they have found a new toy; and believe they can protect their coast by under-water torpedo boats. It reminds one of the *mitrailleuses* with which they were to conquer Germany in 1870. Quite ludicrous is the subscription for such a boat" (*Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 415. January 31, 1899).

BOOK XIII

1897–1898

CHAPTER LVII

THE ECLIPSE OF "SPLENDID ISOLATION"

(1897–1898)

FAILURE of Traditional Policy—The Great Alternative—Chamberlain's Earlier Relations with German Diplomacy—"Sine Germania nulla salus"—From Bismarck to William II.—Growing Embitterment—Stubborn Contests as Colonial Minister with the Wilhelmstrasse—Kiao-chau, Port Arthur and the Chinese Crisis—A World changed for ever—National Alarm—"The Break-up of China"—Lord Salisbury and the Storm of Censure—Chamberlain as Pioneer of the Anglo-Japanese Pact—His Counsels of Resistance—Russia's Triumph—Britain has no Ally—What then?

I

PARALLEL with the events and crises described in the last few chapters, negotiations with Germany were proceeding in secret. Initiated by the Colonial Secretary in person, they were the first of a series of discussions spread over several years. Had they succeeded, the World War which broke out after his era could not have occurred. There might have been other large wars, but the magnitude of the eventual catastrophe would have been impossible.

Pursued with unexpected patience and forbearance as well as conviction, Chamberlain's efforts for an Anglo-German alliance are amongst the strongest passages of his life and still the least known. We shall see him at the centre of foreign affairs, sustaining a part such as no British Minister who was neither Premier nor Foreign Secretary had played before. Until the German archives were thrown open in recent years and Eckardstein's Memoirs published—not to speak of a mass of subsidiary literature—the importance of that part was not understood and scarcely suspected at home or abroad. German

BOOK XIII. 1897–98.

writers have done him more justice than he has yet received in his own country.[1]

As in the case of all his contemporaries, there were fantasies in his visions of the future, but, when we look to what was realistic in his judgment and practicable in his plans, we shall see that none of the world's statesmen from the fall of Bismarck to 1914 made so bold an attempt to stem the drift to calamity. Let us allow that throughout he was thinking of his own country first and of the British Empire. That is not his demerit. It was his obligation. He brought to his endeavour no false unction—none ever accused him of that vice—but he did seek to bring about a reasonable and stable adjustment between British interests and those of other Powers.

II

Well might the Kaiser suppose that Jubilee pomps had been followed by retribution; that the disproportion between the extent of the British Empire and its power had been exposed to the whole world. Never in the Queen's reign had Britain been beset in foreign policy by so many troubles together. We have just seen that in relations with France one risk of war existed on the Niger and another on the Nile. Milner's private letters from South Africa were full of warnings.

But these and other anxieties seemed almost dwarfed by apprehensions concerning the Far East. Towards the end of 1897, Germany's descent on Shantung, though far from welcome to St. Petersburg, forced the pace of Russian policy. The Tsar's ships entered Port Arthur. Disputes ensued amongst the Powers, and between them and Peking, about loans and concessions and spheres of interest. The largest of human societies seemed likely to be thrown into the melting-pot. British interests were ignored; our protests flouted and overridden. A Chinese

[1] See *Die Grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette*, 1871–1914, especially vols. iii., iv. and vols. xi. to xx. (this great publication is hereinafter referred to as *Grosse Politik*); and also amongst many other works the following: Freiherr von Eckardstein, *Lebenserinnerungen und politische Denkwürdigkeiten*, 2 vols.; Erich Brandenburg, *Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege*; Eugen Fischer, *Holsteins Grosses Nein*; Otto Hammann, *Deutsche Weltpolitik, 1890–1912*; Friedrich Meinecke, *Geschichte des deutsch-englischen Bundnissproblems 1890–1901*; Fürst von Bulow, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. i. (specious and untrustworthy).

diplomat in London was reported to have remarked: "Britain and China, two such great Empires, and look at them now!"

To understand what follows we must trace Chamberlain's antecedents in relation to Germany.

We have noted, far back in this narrative, how Prince Bismarck distrusted Chamberlain and Dilke alike—but very especially the former—as advanced democrats and friends of Republican France.[1] Later Herbert Bismarck in 1884 came to regard the then President of the Board of Trade "as the most influential of English Ministers", and as a good man in practical dealing.[2] At that time, when bitter ill-will, never afterwards quite allayed, arose between the two nations in the colonial sphere—the flabby sulkiness of British policy most to blame—Chamberlain thought it nothing less than insane needlessly to alienate Germany. He and Dilke, by contrast with Lord Granville's and Lord Derby's unhappy alternations of obstruction and collapse, would have stood up to the Iron Chancellor on some colonial questions while making the frankest concessions on others.[3]

In 1889 Bismarck with double purpose sounded Salisbury on alliance. Then Chamberlain in renewed conversation with Herbert Bismarck emphasised his desire for better relations. "His friendship for Germany never was so sharply marked as in our conversation of yesterday. He said absolutely *Sine Germania nulla salus*, and insisted that on both sides we must devote our whole attention to remove all points of difference that might arise between the two countries in the future."[4] Definite as usual, he startled the Iron Chancellor's son by suggesting that, for an equivalent, Britain should cede Heligoland. He wanted German South-West Africa in exchange. He added to Count Herbert, "We must mop up all conceivable difficulties between us". "Speak direct to Hartington and Salisbury and tell them both I asked you to do it."[5] But the Iron Chancellor's tragedy was already preparing, and in a year he fell.

Lord Rosebery's Government began to feel and resent a new tone of habitual hectoring on the part of the Wilhelmstrasse.

[1] Vol. I. of this work, p. 495.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 496-497.
[3] *Ibid.* pp. 497-498.
[4] *Grosse Politik*, vol. iv. pp. 406-409 (Count Herbert Bismarck to Prince Bismarck, March 27, 1889).
[5] *Ibid.* pp. 408-409.

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The Liberals went out leaving Anglo-German relations in a state of chronic inflammation. How unpleasant they had become Chamberlain did not suspect until he looked into the confidential papers. Another malign factor must not be forgotten, though it lies apart from the main theme of these pages and can only be mentioned. Very shortly after the Unionist Government took over Salisbury personally fell into the Kaiser's bad graces and under dark suspicion at the Wilhelmstrasse. They assumed absurdly that he plotted to hasten a break-down of the Ottoman Empire, whereas his real purpose was to avert by agreements beforehand the armed conflicts which otherwise would follow a collapse ultimately inevitable.[1]

Thus when Chamberlain came back to office in the summer of 1895 as Colonial Secretary, he found himself in a position peculiarly exposed to controversy with Berlin. He is still emphatically for German friendship, if he can have it on reciprocal terms. The fates are adverse. We have seen that the Jameson Raid itself was not more infatuated than the series of impulses to which it excited William II.

From this turning-point up to the Queen's Jubilee and to the simultaneous African and Asiatic perils not long after, Chamberlain appears to Germans in two aspects. They see him as the impelling force of British Imperialism; as the unwelcome advocate of federation and closer commercial union of the Empire; as the hardest man they have met in colonial negotiations. But also as a statesman whose political stature has "rather risen above Lord Salisbury's head".[2]

When the Prime Minister fails to encourage the hint of possible German annexations in China, the Kaiser writes: "We shall get nothing willingly, but only what we can take for ourselves with an armed fist".[3] Somewhat later, in accordance with the recommendations of the Colonial Conference during the Jubilee, Lord Salisbury "denounces", in the technical sense, the old Belgian and German treaties which prevented the Colonies from giving preference to the mother country. The Kaiser's indigna-

[1] Erich Brandenburg, *Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege*, pp. 62-65.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiii. pp. 16-18 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, April 22, 1897).

[3] *Ibid.* p. 27, footnote (Kaiser's marginal comment on a letter from Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, May 12, 1897).

tion and alarm knew no bounds. "This is the beginning of war to the knife against our flourishing productive State." The alarm was fantastic; on the part of the monarch of a great Protectionist State the indignation humorous. There was a more ominous thing. William II. adds: "Had we a fleet strong enough to enforce respect, the notice to terminate the old treaties would not have been given; our answer must be to keep in view a speedy and significant increase of our new construction".[1] The popular agitation for German naval expansion, already inaugurated from above, was henceforth worked up with sedulous fervour.

III

Meanwhile and later the Colonial Secretary has to cope in West Africa with German pressure as well as French. This particular dispute also he inherited from the Rosebery Government. It is necessary to touch on it, in passing, for two reasons. It caused inordinate irritation in Berlin, and it did as much as anything to sharpen German diplomatic prejudice against Chamberlain himself.

They wish for valuable additions to their cramped colony of Togoland, but remain loath to offer any real *quid pro quo*. He holds that our Gold Coast Colony has already lost enough of its proper hinterland, and he seeks to save every inch he can in the basin of the important Volta river just as in that of the lower Niger. The Germans call him a flinty bargainer, and accuse him of obstinate hostility. He replies that their persistence in demanding something for nothing leaves him no choice. He will not do business on those terms. When his difficulties on the Niger are moving to the worst, they threaten, in the manner becoming too familiar, that if he will not yield they will combine with France. The weaker they think Britain's position the tougher they find him.

During the latter part of 1897 contention between the Wilhelmstrasse and the Colonial Office threatens to come to a head. Three distinct questions are involved. In West Africa, the Germans press hard (1) for an exceedingly profitable little piece

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiii. p. 34 (William II. to Hohenlohe, August 1, 1897).

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of British territory on the coast, the Volta "triangle", which cuts off their Togoland from the mouth of that river; (2) for extending Togoland to the north by dividing up a large neutral zone already mapped out in that direction; while (3) the Kaiser and Admiral Tirpitz covet, above all, Samoa, Germany at first wants Britain to join in asking the United States to quit the Samoan group altogether as compensation for the American annexation of Hawaii. Lord Salisbury declines to act in that sense. "You ask me to put my hand into a wasps' nest."[1] Germany then desires more urgently to acquire at least the British portion of Samoa.

Chamberlain's mind on all three questions, while not uncompromising, was cool. He disliked ceding any portion of actual British territory anywhere. If, against the grain of his department, he brings himself to consider the possibility of transferring to Togoland the Volta triangle, dear to Liverpool, he wants a better exchange than Berlin will give. Secondly, as to the neutral zone of the common hinterland, the Germans are asking too much of it. Thirdly, as to Samoa, he has to reckon with the antagonism of Australia and New Zealand to British withdrawal; but he will face that unpleasantness in exchange for the German share of New Guinea. He writes prophetically to the Prime Minister:

> We could not possibly offer Germany more than a free hand in Samoa in return for New Guinea, which is valueless to them and which some day the Australians will take by force if they do not get it otherwise. Even this concession will make the New Zealanders very angry.[2]

Berlin, with rising temper, again refuses to exchange its part of New Guinea in deference to the feeling of Australasian democracies.

IV

At this point—it was the end of autumn 1897—the first proposal for more direct discussion with a statesman so powerful and determined came from the Wilhelmstrasse itself; and, as

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiii. p. 40 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, September 27, 1897).

[2] Chamberlain to Salisbury, November 25, 1897.

later, it came through the agent whose reminiscences are now well known. Chamberlain was at Highbury. Baron Eckardstein of the German Embassy called at the Colonial Office. He "said that he has just returned from Berlin where serious trouble with Great Britain in regard to West Africa was anticipated. He had advised Baron Richthofen, the German Colonial Secretary, to seek a private and unofficial interview with you before any steps were taken for official negotiations. . . . In fact Baron Richthofen would like to meet you for a private conversation to be held without the cognisance of this Department (Colonial Office), the Foreign Office or the Press."[1]

Chamberlain asked at once for the Prime Minister's consent. Salisbury replied, "Your meeting with Richthofen would probably be of value and it certainly could not hinder anything. The Germans have evidently held on to the neutral zone in the hope that they might use it to squeeze us about the Volta."[2]

On the very same day, however, Count Hatzfeldt, after an interview with Salisbury, left the Foreign Office with an irate impression that further negotiations just then could not lead to any satisfactory result and that the chief blame must be imputed to "Mr. Chamberlain's personal ambition" and perhaps also to his scant sympathy with Germany.[3] The Premier, says the German ambassador, in effect, represents Chamberlain as having the last word in these West African matters, but partly Salisbury may be using his Colonial Minister as a useful bogy. There was a spice of truth in this latter surmise. Sometimes it was convenient, for the general interests of British statesmanship, that the head of the Government should appear as mild as Spenlow and hint that his colleague was Jorkins.

Unfortunately no more was heard of a meeting at Christmas between Chamberlain, quick to reciprocate any conciliatory sign, and Richthofen, one of the fairest and ablest of German Ministers.

By this time, in the last weeks of 1897, just after the seizure of Kiao-chau, foreign events were advancing by forced marches. The whole scene of world-policy was changed for ever.

[1] Minute by Lord Ampthill for Chamberlain, November 29, 1897.

[2] Salisbury to Chamberlain, December 1, 1897.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 108-109 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, December 2, 1897).

V

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"You have been lucky in murders", wrote Delane when on holiday to *The Times*. Bülow might have said the same to William II. The almost providential murder of two of his subjects, Catholic missionaries, occurred in that very region of the Celestial Empire on which his eyes were already fixed. Long since he had been advised that a fine inlet on the coast of the great province of Shantung would be in every way the best choice for a naval and commercial position in China. Two years before the crisis we have now reached he had ordered all plans to be prepared for a sudden seizure of Kiao-chau at some apt moment.[1] Nothing could be more suitable than the fate of German missionaries in Shantung of all provinces, and William II. declared that he would be held back no longer.[2]

Kiao-chau was seized in mid-November. At first British opinion was rather disapproving than alarmed. Chamberlain gave little heed to a spectacular stroke which seemed more showy than wise for Germany herself and of little meaning for the future. A few weeks showed that the German coup was the beginning of incalculable disturbances. Before Christmas the Tsar's warships steamed into Port Arthur. Two small British ships were at anchor as of right and by usage. Soon at Russia's request they were withdrawn. Even sober opinion at home felt this as a stinging humiliation. All the signs suggested still graver developments.

At the outset of the crisis the Colonial Secretary hinted to the Prime Minister that something would have to be done.

CHAMBERLAIN AND SALISBURY

Highbury, December 29, 1897.—*Chamberlain to Salisbury.*—Public opinion has been expecting some sensational action on our part. Public opinion is a very bad guide, but I suppose we shall be sharply questioned when Parliament meets, and if we do absolutely nothing before then, I

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 46-47, footnotes.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 67: "I am thoroughly resolved . . . with full severity and at need with the most brutal regardlessness (*brutalster Rücksichtslosigkeit*) to show the Chinese at last that the German Emperor does not allow himself to be played with and that it is bad to have him for an enemy" (the Kaiser to his Foreign Office, November 6, 1897).

fear the effect of our self-effacement both on our own friends and on foreign Governments.

Hatfield, December 30, 1897.—*Salisbury to Chamberlain.*— . . . I agree with you that "the public" will require some territorial or cartographic consolation in China. It will not be useful, and will be expensive; but as a matter of pure sentiment, we shall have to do it. I think it will be Chusan.

Chamberlain's answer may be called historic. Amongst statesmen he is now the pioneer of the Anglo-Japanese alliance—an unprecedented association not brought about for some few years afterwards, but then arranged with consequences direct and indirect which became of epochal significance and are still in full action. After the Kruger telegram the Colonial Secretary as we saw wrote on good information to the First Lord of the Admiralty that the Japanese would like nothing better than to show their sympathy. Now as before he was brought back to this theme chiefly by Sir Edwin Arnold, married to a Japanese wife and as a writer in the *Daily Telegraph* always the Minister's generous and effectual friend.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Highbury, December 31, 1897.—Talking of Allies, have you considered whether we might not draw closer to Japan? It seems to me that they are rapidly increasing their means of offence and defence, and in many contingencies they would be valuable Allies. They are at this moment much inclined to us and, being very sensitive, would appreciate any advance made to them. If we decided to take anything, and were to inform them beforehand, I imagine that we should be sure of their support. I do not suppose that a Treaty of Alliance would be desirable, but I should hope that an understanding might be arrived at which would be very useful. In any case they are worth looking after as it is clear that they do not mean to be a *quantité négligeable* in the East.

The letter goes on to advocate warmly a suggestion from Sir Edwin Arnold in a private letter[1]—that the Japanese should be invited to raise their Legation in London to an Embassy. "I venture to think that there is something in this. It would be

[1] Arnold to Chamberlain, December 30, 1897.

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understood by the other Powers as an indication of an 'unwritten Alliance' without committing us." This, at least, the Prime Minister liked. It was done.

VI

Lord Salisbury attempted to reach a direct understanding with Russia through her ablest statesman. M. Witte seemed favourable, and mentioned the word "alliance".[1] These negotiations came to nothing, owing to Russia's resolve to dominate at Peking and squeeze its trembling mandarins. Witte in another conversation with our ambassador in St. Petersburg drew his hand—it was a large hand—over a map of China and said that sooner or later its northern provinces would probably be absorbed by the Tsardom.[2]

Before many more weeks were over this anticipation seemed quite likely to be fulfilled. In March Russia extorted the lease of Port Arthur and its peninsula. This formidable position was commonly called the Gibraltar of the Yellow Sea and regarded as the key of the Far East. A railway connecting it with the trans-Siberian trunk-line would be built and all Manchuria would pass under Russian sway. The Government of China as a whole might be manipulated by Russian domination at the capital. As it once was said, "There are no Pyrenees", might it not now be said, "There is no Great Wall"?

In vain our Foreign Office protested that these things would be looked on in the Far East "as a standing menace to Peking and the commencement of the partition of China".[3] A storm of public wrath raged round Lord Salisbury's devoted head. His repute in the nation diminished at this time and never quite recovered, while on the Unionist side Chamberlain's influence was exalted. The disparagement of the Prime Minister was unfair. He was not the man he had been; he had no surprises of energy or resource to offer; but in the main he suffered the censures of hasty passion.

[1] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 5-7; and especially p. 8, where Lord Salisbury, writing to Sir N. O'Conor (January 25), offers sweeping concessions to Russia.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 8 (Sir N. O'Conor to Lord Salisbury, January 30, 1898).

[3] *Ibid.* p. 23 (Salisbury to Sir N. O'Conor, March 22, 1898).

The Prime Minister's attitude of ironic acquiescence in accomplished facts seems to have been based partly on the inability of his Government to prevent them; and partly on his desire to avoid courses which would be much worse than useless. Unless we were very careful we would promote closer combination for all purposes—including the African issues then at an especially perilous phase as we have fully seen—between Russia, France and Germany. Salisbury's policy though bound to prove inadequate in the long run was provisionally sagacious. All immediate appearances were against it. The island and the world talked of Britain's defeats and retreats.

VII

To Chamberlain's nature a course of drift, even when philosophically adopted as the lesser evil, was little endurable. By no means a blind opponent of Russia's secular movement towards free water, whether in the Far East or the Near East, he wished to set bounds to her advance into China proper.

Fastening at once upon the principle known later as that of the "open door", he would have maintained that policy at the hazard of war. He reckoned that facing the risk would remove it; that nerve would once more be as successful in the Far Eastern crisis as had been Beaconsfield's in the Near Eastern crisis.[1] The flaw in the analogy he was soon to perceive. Beaconsfield, in reality, was by no means isolated. The Colonial Secretary's mind is best expressed in a strong letter to his colleague, the leader of the House of Commons:

CHAMBERLAIN TO BALFOUR

Secret.—Highbury, February 3, 1898.—I wish that you read all the papers just now. If you did I think you would agree with me that grave trouble is impending upon the Government if we do not adopt a more decided attitude in regard to China. . . . If only Lord Salisbury sees the peril and is prepared to meet it, I would rather leave to him the method

[1] Of the situation just at this phase *The Times* wrote afterwards (March 25): "The complications which have subsequently arisen would probably have been averted if the British Government had made it clear long ago that it did not intend to permit the situation to be altered to its disadvantage by any threatened act of force on the part of any other Power or combination of Powers".

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than rush in with what may be impossible suggestions. But as the matter now appears to me I should propose:

1. To approach the United States officially and to ask an immediate reply from them to the question, "Will you stand in with us in our policy?"

2. To approach Germany at the same time with the same question.

3. Our Chinese policy to be a declaration that any port occupied by a foreign nation shall be, *ipso facto*, a Treaty port, open to all on precisely similar conditions. That this applies to Talienwan, Port Arthur and Kiao-chau, and to any further acquisition of land by any European nation or by the Japanese. . . . That if Russia refuses these terms we should summon her fleet to leave Port Arthur and make her go if necessary.

I daresay this line is much too strong for the Cabinet but if we do not do something, and that quickly, we shall have a bad quarter of an hour when Parliament meets.

The meeting of Parliament, a few days after the date of this letter, was in fact followed by weeks of damaging debate. The Prime Minister's policy in the Far East was denounced by most of his Conservative followers for want of eyesight and lack of backbone. To Chamberlain's disappointment Japan held off, for reasons that as we know to-day were deep. Full of foreboding, charged with resentment against both Russia and Germany, she was not yet powerful enough for sure intervention. Japan was resolved to double her armaments while biding her time for certain measured years.

Towards the end of March, the triumph of Russian policy seemed complete. Menace and lubrication at Peking had obtained the formal lease of Port Arthur as a fortress and Talienwan as an open harbour, both to be linked up by Russian railways across Manchuria with the great trans-Continental line from St. Petersburg. This dazzling diplomatic success, in appearance, was in fact the invisible prelude to the armed rise of an Asiatic nation to the full rank of a Great Power. It was amongst the original causes, and not the least, of the total ruin and disappearance of the Tsardom.

At home nearly all Unionists, and the nation generally, believed that there was no security for the "open door" in Man-

churia; that there was no sufficient security for any British interest in China where our trade still largely preponderated: and that, in the repeated words of Her Majesty's Government itself, the "dismemberment" or "partition" of China had begun. The world believed that Britain—so soon after all our Imperial hymnology at the Jubilee—had suffered a diplomatic *débâcle* hardly to be repaired; exhibiting our decay not only in real Imperial strength but in the pith of national character. There was little division in the world's opinion about the fundamental cause of the British Empire's creeping weakness in foreign policy. The cause was "isolation". There was a Triple Alliance. There was a Dual Alliance. Crosswise there were the instances and possibilities of concerted action between these redoubtable groups. Britain only amongst the Powers, for all the size of her Empire and her other interests everywhere, had no ally. We must look at the practical and psychological circumstances as they were when the Colonial Secretary attempted a great diversion.

CHAPTER LVIII

FIRST EFFORTS FOR ANGLO-GERMAN ALLIANCE—FULL LIGHT

(1898)

AN Hour of Emergency—How Negotiations began—Eckardstein and Alfred Rothschild—The German Ambassador to meet British Ministers—Berlin, the New Navy Law and a Double Policy—Balfour and an Interlude—Interviews between Hatzfeldt and the Colonial Secretary—Chamberlain's Memoranda of all the Meetings—German Policy of Eluding Entanglement and "Keeping England Hopeful"—Eckardstein Version: The Kaiser is Favourable—Chamberlain's Warning: "Le bonheur qui passe".

I

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IT is true, though painful, to say that towards the end of March 1898 the British Government as a body did not know what to do. Yet the country demanded action. Time and trouble pressed as seldom on a Cabinet in search of a policy. Chamberlain for his part formed the conclusion that "splendid isolation" was a bankrupt policy.[1]

Relations with France at that moment, as we have seen, were hazardous enough on the Niger and might become strained to extremity on the Nile. There was no hope in Monsieur Hanotaux, in whose sight the multiple pressure on Britain was pleasing as a general condition and promised well for his own African purposes. Russia seemed to be aiming not only at the mastery of

[1] It is a public duty to give in full the four memoranda by Chamberlain which will be found in this chapter. The Foreign Office does not possess copies. The editors of *British Documents* say in their foreword to vol. i. that "there is practically no evidence in our official records as to the first Anglo-German *rapprochement* which began in March 1898. . . . The explanation is that this transaction was in the hands of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, and was thus treated as a private matter."

Manchuria—that alone the Colonial Minister was prepared, however reluctantly, to accept—but at a gradual ascendancy in China, which Britain alone could not limit and nothing but some combination of Powers could prevent.

As the conditions of the choice lay, he threw himself with his whole decision into the endeavour to effect a thorough agreement for mutual support between England and Germany. For that purpose he would not shrink from "alliance". That word the passive tradition of over forty years had made alarming or abhorrent to the ears of all well-regulated British statesmen. But one plain thing here must be remembered. He by no means believed that to settle with France and Russia would be impossible in the last resort. He never dreamed of negotiating with Berlin on other than equal terms or of regarding this country as reduced to dependence on Germany.

Neither William II. nor any one of his advisers ever understood that in Chamberlain they were dealing with a man who combined intuitive impulse and cold steel; and that in his mingling of good will and good judgment, of sentiment and realism, he represented, though with unusual articulateness and force, the ordinary qualities of the British people—or rather of the English people, for he had not a drop of any other blood.

II

The initiative came from the German side. This must be well noted. When British feeling was strongest and the perplexities of the British Cabinet were extreme, Freiherr von Eckardstein renewed his recent efforts to bring Chamberlain into direct contact with German diplomacy. The intermediary's own narrative, with many slips of memory and with heightened effects, gives a living impression of the persons, the atmosphere and the coulisses. By contrast with all the German accounts Chamberlain's own memoranda are dry and precise.

Married to an English wife, Eckardstein was a very familiar and friendly figure in our society. He towered above most other tall men. When he appeared in his white uniform, in helmet and boots, he looked like a cuirassier with a thoughtful head. Well acquainted with the Rothschilds, whose name in London

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was still legendary, he was particularly intimate with one of them, Alfred de Rothschild, who shared, and with more lively apprehension, the general uneasiness of the City about contingencies in China, where diplomacy and finance were now inextricably mixed in a desperate scramble for loans and concessions. There were other motives and factors. Alfred de Rothschild was pro-German by heredity, and the oppression of his race by the Tsardom had made him unfavourable to Russia and to most things Russian. Like no other private financier since, he was deservedly on confidential terms with leading members of successive British Governments.

Eckardstein had been introduced to Chamberlain in America —at Newport nearly ten years before. In London they met as men well acquainted, though as yet not intimate. Nor is it needless to note that the cuirassier turned diplomat figured in the influential circle of that great lady Louise Duchess of Devonshire, by birth a Countess Alten of Hanover, sister of a German general prominent in the military suite of the old Emperor's Court, and in her day one of the most beautiful women of her time—some said, of any time.[1] The Duke, now almost past ambition—though so near the Premiership more than once—was no longer easy to rouse. But the alarm of Lancashire about the future of its cotton trade in the Chinese market, as well as his long-felt sympathy with his wife's wish to preserve the best relations between England and Germany, moved him to make almost a hobby of the Far Eastern question. Thus for public and private reasons the Duke wholly shared Chamberlain's belief that a complete settlement with Germany ought to be attempted.

Eckardstein gives as in February 1898 a date which must have been in March. He was present when Alfred Rothschild gave a small dinner in Seymour Place. The other guests were three members of the Cabinet: Chamberlain, the Duke, and Henry Chaplin. The news from China was more than ever disquieting and Ministerial perplexities extreme.[2]

It was agreed that Eckardstein should try to arrange a

[1] G. W. Smalley, *Anglo-American Memories*, pp. 37-44: "The late Duchess of Devonshire". This little sketch is not negligible amongst the social and political portraits of the period.

[2] Eckardstein, *Lebenserinnerungen*, vol. i. p. 292.

meeting between his chief, the German ambassador, and the Colonial Secretary. The ambassador consented with satisfaction, but for the wrong reasons. His spirit was not promising. For one thing, he partly disliked, partly dreaded, and partly underestimated Chamberlain, regarding him as an imperious and ambitious character whose rise in the State was owing to demagogic gifts. Conscious of an antique pedigree, Paul Hatzfeldt disparaged both the motives and powers of a man so utterly unlike any Continental type, so hard to be measured by old diplomatists *de carrière*; and rather indulged the fancy of bringing Chamberlain to eat a little humble pie in Britain's bad hour.

Essential here to realise the circumstances in Berlin itself. There were mingled reasons for elation and nervousness. By strange coincidence the Bill which founded the new German fleet was just then passing through its final stages in the Reichstag.[1] William II. and his advisers desired nothing less than any binding connection with England which would fetter their naval expansion. Yet, knowing their own far-reaching calculations and fearing a premature awakening in this country, they desired nothing more than to manage England prudently for some years to come. It seemed high policy to keep Britain in play, to evade entanglement, and to work for incidental gains.

Count Hatzfeldt on March 24 (Thursday) telegraphed to the Wilhelmstrasse that he was invited by Baron Alfred de Rothschild to lunch next Saturday to meet some Cabinet Ministers (perhaps Balfour and Chamberlain). "I have an impression that the initiative is not Rothschild's alone and that the main object is to make a confidential attempt at a *rapprochement* with Germany."[2] Balfour, it must be remembered, was acting as Foreign Secretary. His uncle the Prime Minister was ill in the South of France. Requesting instructions, Hatzfeldt adds that he will "give Chamberlain distinctly to understand" that before any *rapprochement* can be promoted in Berlin, he must convince the Kaiser's ambassador that "he will show himself more responsive in certain colonial questions, for example in the neutral zone.

[1] Schulthess, *Europäischer Geschichtskalender*, March 23–28, 1898, pp. 80-88.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 193-194 (Hatzfeldt to Holstein, March 24, 1898).

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[The region behind Ashanti and Togoland.]" This tone was little in accord with Chamberlain's conception of respective positions and with his idea of procedure.

III

The date on which the German ambassador received Rothschild's invitation and telegraphed to Berlin was conspicuous in the Anglo-Russian controversy. In the afternoon Balfour repeated to the Russian ambassador the deep objection of Her Majesty's Government to a military occupation of Port Arthur. It would begin "the dismemberment of China". This was grave language, indeed, if language alone could be grave. A few hours later non-official intelligence was a derisory comment. *The Times*, which led national opinion through the crisis, had been brilliantly informed by its Peking correspondent, George Morrison; and now received his famous message announcing the event he had foreshadowed—that China, under duress, had already conceded all the Russian demands.

Next day, when the country was ringing with the news,[1] the British Government sent its Far Eastern fleet to the Gulf of Pechili, and decided to take Wei-hai-wei. The crisis was no longer suitable for discussion at the projected dinner-party. Balfour, as acting Foreign Secretary, requested a private talk with the German ambassador. It took place at once (Friday, March 25) at Alfred Rothschild's house. Amongst long-familiar matters of complaint the ambassador brought up Chamberlain's hardness in negotiation—his alleged "unfriendly obstinacy in all Colonial questions". Balfour, though reticent on a topic so delicate, leaves the impression that he will try to soften his colleague.[2]

Now Chamberlain's part begins. At Hatzfeldt's own request —there is no doubt of this—he in his turn consented to hold a private conversation. Needless to say, it was of a very different kind. It occurred early in the next week, Tuesday, March 29.[3] For once we can compare accounts.

[1] *The Times*, March 25, 1898.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 195-196.

[3] To realise the atmosphere of the time and how much graver was the hour than either Chamberlain or the German ambassador could then guess, though the former's instinct

Chamberlain's own cool version set down the same day bears this addendum: "I told Mr Balfour of Count Hatzfeldt's wish to see me before accepting, and after the interview I reported the result to him—and later to the Cabinet on March 30". His characteristic purpose was to sweep the smaller questions out of the way in return for a great arrangement. If the Germans were ready for the big settlement there would be little difficulty about colonial details, their *Einzelfragen*.

CHAMBERLAIN'S FIRST MEMORANDUM

Colonial Office, March 29, 1898.—Count Hatzfeldt having expressed a desire to see me, we met at a private house, and had a long conversation.

Count Hatzfeldt began by referring to questions between Germany and Great Britain, and especially to the partition of the Neutral Zone [in West Africa] and the promotion of railways in Shantung in China. On the former point I said we had agreed to leave the Zone,[1] and that there was now no matter of contention between the two countries. We were ready to discuss partition but not anxious for it, as the neutralisation of the territory was quite satisfactory to us if the engagement on both sides was strictly observed.

This part of the conversation was in the nature of a skirmish, and Count Hatzfeldt did not press the subject.

I said that as far as I knew, there was no question between the two Governments which affected any important interest, and they were all absolutely trivial in comparison with the great issues involving our relations with other nations. It seemed to me that on these greater issues the interests of Germany were really identical with our own.

Count Hatzfeldt assented. He said that until a few years ago this was generally recognised, but the circumstances which had followed the Jameson Raid had aroused much feeling in England, and the two countries had drifted apart. That however was past, and he did not see why a better understanding could not now be arrived at.

There was a general impression on the Continent that the policy of the United Kingdom was to bring about a war between other Powers

was grave enough, we must remember that on the very day before the interview, two things had happened. On March 28, the Chinese garrison withdrawn from Port Arthur was replaced by 2000 of the Tsar's troops, who hoisted the Russian flag. On the same date, the Bill founding the new German Navy was finally passed in the Reichstag.

[1] That is to leave it as it stood, an area of equal rights.

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but to take no part in it herself. This produced irritation and distrust, and, in the case of Germany, led her to doubt the possibility of any arrangement with us, while it pushed her towards Russia.

I admitted that the policy of this country for many years had been a policy of isolation—or at least of non-entanglement in alliances. "But", I said, "in the same way, the policy of the United States since the time of Washington has been a policy of non-interference in European questions"; and I asked if he believed that that would last. He said "Certainly not. Before long it must be changed." "Then", I said, "it is possible that the policy of the United Kingdom may be changed by circumstances which are too strong for us to resist."

He asked if I thought the Parliament and people of the country would accept the idea of an alliance even though it would be a guarantee of peace.

The conversation then became more definite, and in the course of questions and answers the following suggestions were evolved. That an alliance might be established by Treaty or Agreement between Germany and Great Britain for a term of years. That it should be of a defensive character based upon a mutual understanding as to policy in China and elsewhere.

It was agreed and clearly expressed that each of us was speaking in his private and personal capacity and that the interview was entirely unofficial. At the close Count Hatzfeldt said, "I hear rumours that you are going to do something in China—that in fact you are going to take Wei-Hai-Wei?" I said there were many rumours—some of them going much further than that—"but I can give you no information". "If you did take Wei-Hai-Wei would it not be a *casus belli* with Russia?"[1] I did not give an answer.—J. C.

Count Hatzfeldt's more animated report is too extended to be given in full here but must be epitomised.[2] There, the Colonial Secretary is given as speaking to the following effect. The situation has taken a turn which no longer allows England to maintain her traditional policy of isolation. In West Africa, Chamberlain will not give way to France. Germany and

[1] The British Government's demand for Wei-hai-wei made on March 25 was accompanied by the words "British fleet is on its way to Gulf of Pechili from Hong Kong". The lease of Wei-hai-wei was not conceded until April 2. *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 25-30.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 196-199 (Hatzfeldt to Bülow March 29, 1898).

England had at bottom the same interests. Colonial differences, relatively small, would adjust themselves were agreement reached on the great matters. In short, "If you now stand on England's side, England will stand on your side if Germany is attacked". The ambassador adds—fairer in his tone than he became a few days later—"In the whole conversation Chamberlain's words were calm and definite, and he made clear with great frankness his wish for a binding agreement between England and the Triple Alliance. He repeated several times that there was no time to be lost, as a decision here must be taken pretty soon."

For many years European diplomacy had known no more momentous conversation. Bismarck not long before his fall had asserted in a session of the Prussian Ministry (August 17, 1889) that the chief aim and object of German policy for ten years had been to win England for the Triple Alliance.[1] Chamberlain had offered the realisation of the Iron Chancellor's dream. Looking simply to the ultimate logic of Triple Alliance and Dual Alliance, Chamberlain assumed that the Kaiser's Government must be still of Bismarck's mind. He was more and more disconcerted by the hitches in the sequel, though no check made him swerve from his purpose.

IV

Bülow's answer, framed doubtless with Holstein's acute aid, was an ambiguous document mingling serious objections with curious inducements.[2] On the one hand, parliamentary conditions and party governments, each apt to reverse the policy of its predecessor, prevent England from being a firm or safe ally.

On the other hand, England's dangers are undoubtedly increasing. The way to deal with the Dual Alliance is to separate its partners, compromising with Russia in order to cope with France. That choice seems urgent. "Time is telling against England." In ten years the Siberian railway and Russian preparations on the Indian frontier will be complete; the Tsar by that time may be less subject to feminine and family influences;

[1] Otto Hammann, *Deutsche Weltpolitik*, 1899–1912, p. 14.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 199-202 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, March 30, 1898).

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and may therefore be less disinclined than at present to join France in a war against England. Yet in ten years the British Constitution will still be the same obstacle to alliance between England and continental Powers. Germany, however, can make her benevolent neutrality a signal service, and in her own obvious interest might intervene if in the course of a war England were threatened with disaster.

All this seems a typical example of the celebrated collaboration between Bülow and Holstein, and they may well have thought it what is called devilish clever. In fact its overcleverness is almost absurd. It lacks the art which conceals art. Its real aim is to suggest that Britain's practical policy is not an alliance with Germany but a war with France. "Need England dread a duel with France? In German military judgment: No.... The English fleet, according to the unanimous estimate of all our naval authorities—I name above all Admiral Tirpitz—is not merely equal to the combined fleets of any other two Great Powers but with certainty superior." [1] Here comes out the ruling passion not understood in our island, except by a very few, for some years to come. At that stage of the German naval design, when William II. and his advisers dreamed of holding the balance of sea-power sooner or later, Admiral Tirpitz might well desire, to begin with, that Britain and France should sink each other's ships.

Meanwhile, it was essential to the nourishment of naval enthusiasm in Germany that anti-British agitation should not be too much checked. We know to-day all the inner motives that the Colonial Secretary in the spring of 1898 did not even faintly suspect. As will be seen, he was not only the simpler but the stronger for his want of suspicion. He was looking beyond Bülow and Holstein, who could not begin to comprehend that his conception of the ultimate meaning of "the great alternative" for both sides was more realistic and drastic than their own.

V

On the basis of the first answer of the Wilhelmstrasse to his ideas, Chamberlain's next interview with the German

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 199-201 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, March 30, 1898).

ambassador was held at once.[1] He sets himself to take point by point Bülow's objections.

Prophetic, though he did not live to see the vindication, was his defence of the stability and power of Britain as an ally, despite parliamentary and party conditions. For that purpose any Treaty would have to be publicly submitted to the House of Commons, where he believed it would be carried. This would not exclude secret clauses such as are necessary in all such cases for the arrangement of technical details. The benevolent advice of Berlin about coming to some adjustment with Russia he did not reject in principle. He would be prepared to recognise what Russia had acquired, extensive as it was, but there must be some joint-guarantee against her further aggression. He owned frankly that his opinions, though communicated to his colleagues, did not in any way commit them.

CHAMBERLAIN'S SECOND MEMORANDUM

Colonial Office, April 1, 1898.—Count Hatzfeldt called on me by appointment at the Colonial Office at 4.30 to-day.

He began by saying that he had telegraphed the substance of our preceding interview to M. de Bülow, and had received from him a long telegram in reply, the effect of which he desired to state. M. de Bülow recognised the frankness with which I had given my personal sentiments, and was ready to reciprocate with equal candour.

In the first place he wished to represent that our system was entirely different from that of other nations. It was Parliamentary in a fuller sense.

He knew that a Treaty made with our Government would be honourably observed by it—but might it not be upset by the next Government if the Opposition came into power? In fact could any Continental Power make an agreement with Great Britain and rely upon its observance by successive administrations and parliaments?

Then he was in doubt as to what our policy really was in regard to the East and other questions. His view was that we had difficulties with Russia and France which might lead to war with either or both Powers. If we went to war with France alone, he was advised by expert authorities that there could be no doubt of the result. We should beat France

[1] This second meeting was on Friday of the same week, the first having been on the Tuesday.

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at the present time, wherever our Navy could act; and it would be impossible for the French Army to operate anywhere against us. But if we were at war with Russia and France at the same time, the situation would be serious.

As regards Germany, their interest was against any policy which would materially cripple the sea-power of England. They knew perfectly well that in such a case they would be attacked next. Therefore, in no case would they join a combination against us. Treaty or no Treaty, the worst we had to anticipate from them was that they would remain neutral. Russia had tried under Lobanoff, and again under Muravieff, to bring about a general combination against us, but Germany would never listen to it, as it was against her real interest.

Now if we made difficulties with Russia in China, and war ensued, France would have to join Russia, and we should be face to face with the Dual Alliance. If, on the other hand, we came to an agreement with Russia about China and quarrelled with France about West Africa, Russia would certainly not run the risk of a great war in such a cause.

This being the state of the case, as it appeared to M. de Bülow, Count Hatzfeldt asked me what I had to say to the preliminary objection that no treaty would be binding on our successors.

I said I thought M. de Bülow shared a common misapprehension of continental nations. Yet if he would look back he would see that there was no case in history in which a Treaty made by one party in this country had been repudiated by another. There was really more certainty in our foreign policy than in that of nations where the personality of the Ruler was a greater feature. A Treaty made with the Emperor of Russia, for instance, might be repudiated, if he died, by a successor who did not share his views, but I could not conceive it possible that a Treaty accepted by any British Parliament on behalf of the nation would be repudiated by another Parliament.

Count Hatzfeldt asked if I held this view as to a secret Treaty. I said that in my personal judgment any treaty of the kind we were talking of ought to be made public and submitted to Parliament.[1] If this were not the case the obligation of honour upon a succeeding Government would be much less, but even then I thought that repudiation would be an extreme measure, unlikely although not impossible.

Then he asked if I thought it possible that Parliament would accept

[1] This must be well noted.

such a Treaty. I replied that, subject to the details being satisfactory, I believed that the country would be prepared to recognise the necessity, or at least the advantage, of a change of policy which would give us an ally in presence of a combination of other States.

As regards the policy of this country, to which M. de Bülow had referred, I said that of course would depend on the circumstances. If we were to remain isolated and to be left to fight our own battle for ourselves, we should naturally make the best terms we could, and it might be our best course to take the line M. de Bülow had suggested and to come to terms with Russia, while remaining free to settle our differences with France. But I asked Count Hatzfeldt whether, if Russia left France to settle with us alone in China and West Africa, he thought that the Franco-Russian Alliance would continue. He said that France was so sick of isolation that she would be willing to accept the crumbs from the Russian table, rather than again be forced to eat alone. I said if we had a clear understanding with Germany and a joint policy we might adopt a much stronger attitude than if we were alone, and in this case we could lay down the bases of a settlement in China which neither France nor Russia would be likely to resist.

Count Hatzfeldt said that the Emperor of Russia for the present was an advocate of peace. In the future it might be different, and when the Siberian railway was completed ten years hence the situation might be changed, but at this time neither he nor France desired war or were prepared for it.

I asked him where German interests in China would be ten years hence or later, if Russia were established in the North and no arrangements had been come to as to our respective rights and interests. Count Hatzfeldt admitted that like ourselves they could not place European soldiers on the field[1] to resist a Russian advance. He mentioned incidentally a suggestion that the seat of Chinese Government should be removed from Pekin further south.

Then he said that he did not understand that we objected strongly to what Russia had obtained.

I said, "We object most strongly to what we think she may and will obtain".

He asked what kind of arrangement I proposed to prevent further aggression and secure our common interests? I said, speaking only for

[1] In China itself.

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myself, that I thought we might say to Russia—"You have got all you say you want. We are ready to recognise your position, but you must not go further. The rest of China is under our joint protection." Germany might extend that protection over Shantung and the provinces in the Hinterland, and, by agreement with China, Germany might establish there, in the name of and on behalf of China, such control over the financial administration as would secure sufficient funds to provide an army under German officers. At the same time, England might act similarly in the central and southern provinces, and then, if in the future Russia attempted further aggression, she would have to confront not only a war with two great European Powers but also the defensive forces of China organised and led by European officers.

After a little further conversation Count Hatzfeldt said that he did not think that Russia would go to war with Germany in any case. But my proposal was that, if Russia went to war with England, Germany was to make common cause with us. Did I mean the obligation to be reciprocal and that if Germany were attacked by Russia, England would come to her assistance? I said that I certainly did not contemplate as possible any one-sided agreement.

Count Hatzfeldt then asked me if I thought my colleagues shared my views, as he had seen rumours that we sometimes differed.

I said that as to the past at any rate the rumours had been absolutely false, but that in regard to our present conversation it had been agreed that it should be considered absolutely personal, and therefore in the present stage I would offer no opinion as to the views of any of my colleagues. He then said that he had not mentioned the fact of our previous interview to Mr. Balfour, as he did not know whether I considered it as entirely between ourselves.

I said that I considered the interview as strictly private, and the opinions I had expressed did not in any way commit my colleagues, but that I had at once reported the substance of our previous interview to Mr. Balfour, and that as a matter of course no official step could be taken in such a matter without Lord Salisbury's consent. J. C. (*Note.*—I communicated the result of this interview to the Committee of Defence of the Cabinet on the same day.)

Hatzfeldt's account of this interview is more dramatic in accent but similar in substance. He adds a spice of humour. Chamberlain said "with remarkable candour that the Cabinet

even now did not know what to do, nor what to say to the House of Commons".[1] But several things must have alarmed and exasperated Berlin. Chamberlain showed none of the enthusiasm, particularly expected from him, for a victorious war with France alone. Germany, though looking forward to eventual expansion in China, was not yet equipped up to her aspirations. A present general demarcation of zones of influence could not give her a sufficient share. The last thing she desired or intended was to help England to the lion's share by recognising British predominance in the Yang-tse Valley. True, the Colonial Secretary no longer suggested that Germany should join in opposing the acquisitions just gained by Russia. But instead of recognising that "time is telling against England", and being thankful for the offer of German neutrality as the only valuable advantage our harassed Empire could expect from any Power, he persisted in proposing the alliance itself. *His* main idea was *their* fundamental objection.

German policy desired to await events, to strengthen the fleet, to encourage suitable antagonisms between other Powers; to keep free hands until the moment when a new trident might be thrown into wavering scales.

VI

The next Bülow-Holstein dispatch foreshadows the fate of this first project for an Anglo-German alliance. It is framed in a tone of irritation and sub-hostility.

They refuse of course—it is a set device of their dialectic—to accept Chamberlain's view that safe alliance is compatible with democratic conditions. How, they ask, can the recent quarrels between the two peoples, and especially British abuse of the Kaiser, be so easily forgotten? Germany has no present reason to embroil herself with the Tsardom. Should common danger from that quarter ever threaten the interests of Germany and Britain, common action between them would come of itself. Though existing circumstances forbid the gamble of a hazardous and unnecessary alliance with our too parliamentary nation,

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 202-204 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, April 1, 1898).

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the door is not closed. What is impracticable now may become possible in the future.

With all this there is a series of hits at Chamberlain himself. German public opinion already is in the main anti-English. This mood is fed by England's continued doggedness in colonial questions. As things are, Germany can offer England the presumption of goodwill but no assurance. "In the long run England cannot escape the fight for her life." Then she will not be able to find any other ally than Germany nor a better friend. Let the ambassador bring Chamberlain to understand, in the interests of both sides, but especially of England, that it is not advisable to make an eventual entente more difficult by a brusque attitude in the small things.[1]

This amiable allocution is as instructive as any piece in the bundle. Hatzfeldt takes the wink. He represents Balfour himself as owning in strict confidence that wanting to go too fast is Chamberlain's peculiarity and gathers that the failure of the latter's present attempt would not be especially displeasing either to Salisbury or Balfour.[2]

So far, it would seem, William II. had not been informed of these proceedings. They had to be brought to his knowledge. But how? Not by the original documents but by others prepared for his consumption. Hatzfeldt is instructed to send two special reports. One narrates his dealings with Balfour and is fair. The other narrating the conversations with the Colonial Minister introduces new touches showing Chamberlain in an odious light and well calculated to confirm the prejudices of an impulsive sovereign. So often was the Kaiser made the puppet of his servants. Even now Hatzfeldt refuses to suggest that the Colonial Secretary is intentionally scheming to embroil Germany and Russia. None the less he is not to be regarded as a real friend of Germany. To the ambassador his personality is little sympathetic. "In natural intelligence as in energy and great parliamentary skill he assuredly does not fail, but in respect to foreign policy he makes on me the impression of a raw beginner who follows the dictates of his personal vanity, taking no sufficient

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 204-207. Bülow to Hatzfeldt (April 3, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 208 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, April 5, 1898).

account of consequences, in what he does and says. Obviously he would have regarded it as a personal triumph, bringing him a good step nearer the Premiership, could he have succeeded in establishing himself as the author of the English alliance with the Dreibund."[1]

Meanwhile, William II. was exuberantly pleased with his ambassador's report. To Bülow's and Holstein's delectation, as we may well imagine, the All-Highest gives way to the expected impulses in his marginal remarks. By this confessed failure of splendid isolation, "The Jubilee swindle is already over." England eager to join the Triple Alliance? "The dead ride fast!" As for Chamberlain's defence of England's strength and fidelity as an ally under the parliamentary system His Majesty comments—with as little historical relevancy as of foresight into a future that was to cost him his throne, when the truth of Chamberlain's confidence in democracy was proved—"Frederick the Great! shamefully left in the lurch by George". William II. cites a case of dynastic desertion as an example of parliamentary infidelity.

Even before Hatzfeldt's report arrived, the Kaiser praised Balfour's supposed spirit of practical common sense by comparison with the Colonial Secretary's "theoretical and vague fantasies". The obsequious Bülow, of all persons, hastens to suggest that Chamberlain, fantastic no doubt, may be also deceitful (*hinterlistig*). By comparison "Balfour's method and manner are more to be trusted".[2]

VII

It might be thought that this first tragi-comedy of its kind was now played out. By no means yet.

At Alfred Rothschild's suggestion and with Hatzfeldt's approval, Eckardstein, using a good private excuse for his journey,

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 212-216. Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe. April 7, 1898.—A good German historian comments: "Chamberlain thus laid all his cards on the table, which was characteristic of the man and of his aversion from diplomatic mystery-mongering. But to Hatzfeldt . . . this method of pursuing politics seemed amateurish, uncouth and ill-judged. He termed Chamberlain haughtily an 'ignorant novice', which was certainly unjust. Chamberlain acted like a shrewd experienced business man who was seeking to bring about a fusion of interests. . . ." (Erich Brandenburg, *From Bismarck to the World War* (English translation), p. 106).

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 168-170 (Kaiser to Bülow, April 8; Bülow to Kaiser, April 9).

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appeals to Caesar at Homburg. There he is invited to the Imperial table. After dinner for nearly a whole hour, he walks with his master up and down the castle terrace, and leaves in joyous spirits, convinced of the German Emperor's sympathy with the Colonial Secretary's views.[1]

Next day, alas, William II. wrote to his Foreign Office in other terms. An Anglo-German alliance is undesirable at present. "At the same time it is of great importance to keep official sentiment in England favourable to us and *hopeful*. A friendly-minded England puts another card against Russia in our hands, as well as giving us the prospect of winning from England colonial and commercial advantages."[2] The tall ex-cuirassier, married to an English wife, they treated as a pawn, though he had the better instinct. Poor Eckardstein records that in less than a week after his return to London, the ambassador exclaimed in despair that the Wilhelmstrasse, and above all the Kaiser himself, were against a real understanding with England.

Why did Count Hatzfeldt lament? The explanation reaches the very heart of this enquiry. William II., the very day after Eckardstein left Homburg, had decreed the thankless part which his ambassadors in England must make shift to play for the future. "To Count Hatzfeldt's skilful hands will fall the difficult task of putting off the conclusion of a formal alliance, not by a rejection wounding to English feeling but so as to manifest a cordial wish for beneficent co-operation."[3] The negative part of these instructions was but too clear; the rest nebulous.

These pages have explained many motives, then secret, concerning naval plans and diplomatic calculations. We are near a fuller disclosure, and it is as surprising as a detective novel.

Despite the supposed hopelessness of further negotiations in Chamberlain's sense, Eckardstein made a speedy reappearance at the Colonial Office. This time the affair throws unsparing light on the windings of German policy. He states that at Homburg he found his Emperor whole-hearted for an alliance upon

[1] Eckardstein, vol. i. pp. 294-296, April 9, 1898.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 217 (William II. to Wilhelmstrasse, April 10, 1898).

[3] *Ibid.* p. 217 (the Kaiser to the Wilhelmstrasse, April 10, 1898).

a wider basis than originally proposed. Not only so. William II. desired that the discussions should be hastened!

CHAMBERLAIN'S THIRD MEMORANDUM

Colonial Office, April 22, 1898.—Baron Eckardstein called on me by appointment this morning. He stated that he had been to Homburg during the Easter holidays to see the Emperor of Germany and had had several long interviews with him, in the course of which the Emperor had fully discussed the question of a possible alliance between England and Germany. The Emperor viewed such a possibility with the greatest favour, and was most anxious that an agreement should be come to. He was very desirous that the matter should be dealt with immediately, as he feared, if there was any delay, that the pourparlers would leak out and would come to the knowledge of Russia. He especially wished that this should be avoided, and he feared that if any information of what was going on were given to the Court in England it would immediately be communicated to Copenhagen and thence to St. Petersburg.

The Emperor thought that at an early date Italy and Austria should be made acquainted with any proposals, and was confident that they would eagerly join in such an arrangement. The Russians were intriguing most actively to bring about a combination against England, but he recognised that the interests of Germany lay in the opposite direction.

The principle of such an arrangement would be a guarantee by both Powers of the possessions of the other. Baron Eckardstein seemed to think that this guarantee might be against any attack by any other Power, or, if it were desired to limit it, against any attack by two Powers combined.

In the event of such an agreement the Emperor recognised that we ought to have a free hand in Egypt and the Transvaal.

Baron Eckardstein again and again repeated that the Emperor was most anxious that the matter should be dealt with quickly. He seemed to think that the question, whether if a treaty were arranged it should be a secret treaty or should be presented to Parliament, was a matter for the decision of the British Government.

He asked me to lunch privately with him and Count Hatzfeldt on Monday to discuss the matter further.

I reminded him that what we were doing was absolutely personal and unofficial, and I said that I believed that, owing to Lord Salisbury's

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illness, he had not yet been acquainted with the previous conversations, but that I should put him in possession of these as soon as he returned.

The next step in a tortuous course is hard to credit. Eckardstein had made the approach and given the invitation. What Hatzfeldt telegraphed to Berlin was in effect that Chamberlain had asked for a further interview.[1] Bülow sends another complacent reply, and there is not a word in it to confirm Eckardstein's glowing story. *Qui trompe-t-on donc ici?* That it is the Colonial Secretary who seeks to resume the spinning of the threads Bülow takes for granted. The rest repeats the fixed themes of a morbid logician, Holstein. The danger to England's position will surely increase. Germany's neutrality alone offers inestimable advantages. But the assurance of that neutrality must be purchased, let there be no mistake about it, by sufficient British concessions in the Colonial sphere. Otherwise, it would be hard for Germany in the end to remain either a passive or friendly spectator. On these conditions it is good to keep alive the idea of an alliance as music of the future.[2]

No syllable here to bear out that romantic impression of the Emperor's eager desires for an alliance, which had been used to secure another private meeting between the Colonial Secretary and the German ambassador. Had Chamberlain known the text of the latest Bülow-Holstein letter, he would have read it with contempt.

VIII

When the final interview, so dubiously brought about, took place, the unhappy Hatzfeldt, essaying at first the manœuvres he was under orders to employ, finds at last that he is dealing with a sterner man.

He repeats every argument against an alliance at present. To make it perhaps a possibility later, how advisable for England to give colonial concessions now. Pending an improvement of feeling in Germany itself, the judicious course for British policy would be to cultivate the Triple Alliance by entering into close relations with Austria and Italy.

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 218 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, April 23, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 218-221 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, April 24, 1898).

The Colonial Secretary listens grimly. Then he brushes aside all the sophistry. Especially he dislikes and rejects the suggestion that this country should begin to pay Germany cash on account for a hypothesis of neutrality. Austria—Italy—Turkey? They are another question. Is Germany herself prepared to do business on the main proposition or not? If not Britain may look elsewhere. He ends with a prophetic sentence, worth pondering when we come to it.

The best way again is to give the Colonial Secretary's own record—matter of fact as before—and then to supplement it from the ambassador's graphic dispatch:

CHAMBERLAIN'S FOURTH MEMORANDUM

Colonial Office, Monday, April 25, 1898.—I lunched by invitation with Baron Eckardstein to meet Count Hatzfeldt.

After lunch the Baron left us to talk alone.

Count Hatzfeldt spoke at some length of the difficulties which made the German Government cautious at the present time in regard to any agreement.

They were due (1) to the possibility of information leaking out before any Treaty could be finally arranged; (2) to the doubt whether public opinion in either country was as yet fully prepared for the responsibilities which such a treaty involved.

If, he said, the negotiations failed, or the results were not accepted by Parliament, and the Russian Government became aware of what had been attempted, it was certain that they would attack Germany and would be assisted by France.

There must be a risk of failure, or, if the Treaty were a secret one, of repudiation of it by another English Government, and as the risk was, in their case, of an immediate European War, it was too great to be undertaken.

I asked him if he meant that under these circumstances no treaty or agreement was possible. He said, "No". He did not mean that, but he thought the question should be approached in a different way.

He then referred to conversations which he had had with Lord Salisbury during the time of the last Conservative Government, in the course of which he said progress had been made towards an alliance with Italy and Austria. Eight points had been discussed and there seemed a prob-

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ability of some arrangement, but it had been dropped by Lord Salisbury as premature.

He thought that this might be taken up again, and said that if we agreed with Italy and Austria we also agreed with Germany, which was already pledged to support her Allies of the Triple Alliance.

I said that I had no knowledge of these conversations, but that I should think that the difficulty would be in arranging any terms with Austria as to the future of Turkey. Public opinion in England would not stand an alliance with the "great assassin", nor for preserving the integrity of the Turkish Empire.

He said that circumstances had changed a good deal in ten years, and the opinion of Austria on the subject was not the same now as then, but I gathered that the protection of Constantinople from Russian occupation was still a cardinal point.

I said that I gathered that he thought any attempt to secure a direct defensive alliance between Germany and England was premature.

He assented, but said the opportunity might come later.

I reminded him of the French proverb, "*le bonheur qui passe*".

At this the perturbed ambassador, deploring in his heart the course he carried out, reports in vivacious alarm, and at much length, to his self-deluded superiors.[1] His version is more detailed. Chamberlain does not think of disputing with Russia over Port Arthur, Talienwan or Manchuria; in effect, what she has, let her hold. But some day she will advance deeper if she can. Unless limits are set, worse will come. As the Colonial Secretary sees it, his policy does not mean war. It means the only way of avoiding ultimate war. A pact to support the Sultan—and to preserve the untenable—is impossible. He does not reject, however, the idea of some safeguard for Austria's interests in case of change in the Balkans. There is no new need to negotiate for Italy's goodwill. That Italy will go with England is assured by similarity of interests.

But what of the main point? Chamberlain maintains, and decisively, that Germany is the key, not Austria. Anglo-German alliance is the question. Indispensable for security in China, it would of itself assure the adhesion of Austria and Italy. Then

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 221-226 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, April 26, 1898).

comes the momentous passage of the ambassador's dispatch. According to the strictest part of his instructions from the Wilhelmstrasse he came to the question of colonial concessions to improve feeling and so to keep open the possibility of future alliance in spite of the present hindrances. This was too "naïve" —to reverse the venerable diplomatist's former word at the expense of the statesman. The Colonial Minister gave the warning that coming history would bear out:

> Mr. Chamberlain in reply developed in detail the view that if his idea of a natural alliance with Germany must be renounced, it would be no impossibility for England to arrive at an understanding with Russia or with France. . . . As he had told me before he did not hold it advisable in dealing with us or others to settle the smaller questions by English concessions except in connection with a simultaneous general settlement.

In other words, if Berlin were prepared for a firm and complete understanding, there would be no difficulty about subsidiary matters. If not? *Le bonheur qui passe.* Hatzfeldt did not report that remark. But he added a warning of his own:

> I could have no doubt that Mr. Chamberlain in these utterances meant very deliberately to indicate that in case of a definite rejection on our side, England, so far as he has to do with it, will work for an understanding with Russia or France, and that if no political understanding can be reached with us, we must cease here to expect any concession in colonial matters from him.

On this dispatch the All-Highest, as may well be imagined, multiplies marginal exclamations. "The further the Russians engage themselves in Asia, the quieter they sit in Europe." A British settlement with Russia? "Impossible!"[1] These private remarks are the more instructive because unrestrained. De Quincey suggests somewhere that it is falsely said of any man that he is disguised in liquor; on the contrary most men are only disguised in sobriety.

IX

Within twenty-four hours of this unrejoicing luncheon he had arranged, Eckardstein hastens to the Colonial Office to protest his bewilderment and despair. Let him tell his own tale for what

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 226.

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it is worth. The Emperor, he again protests—how he can reiterate the same protests seems by now inconceivable—is still ardent for the alliance, but is kept in the dark.

CHAMBERLAIN'S FIFTH MEMORANDUM

Colonial Office, April 26, 1898.—Baron Eckardstein called at the Colonial Office this morning. He began by expressing great regret that my interview yesterday with Count Hatzfeldt had not led to more definite results. "I cannot understand it. I know that the Emperor was most anxious that the matter should be pressed. Only three days ago I had positive evidence that this was his wish and I am sure he has not changed. He said to me at Homburg that an alliance with England would be the best thing in the world. It would secure the peace for fifty years. I think that Prince Hohenlohe has interfered and that the Emperor does not know how the matter is being managed."

I said that I was of course sorry, as personally I desired that an arrangement might be found possible, but that there was now nothing more to be done.

Baron Eckardstein said that if the opportunity were lost it might never recur. He was sure that German opinion would welcome such an arrangement and that all that was necessary to make it thoroughly popular was a little preparation in the press.

He added that if Austria and Italy had even an inkling that such an arrangement was possible, they would bring such pressure to bear at Berlin that all opposition would be overcome. They would not require a direct arrangement with them, but the indirect advantage of an arrangement between Germany and England would be very great. He quite understood that there was no particular object in a direct alliance between Italy and England, as Italy could do nothing against Russia, while an alliance with Austria might be dangerous, both because it involved some arrangement as to the Turkish Empire, and also because it might involve us in questions affecting the Balkan kingdoms with which we had no concern.

He repeated that the Russians were intriguing all the time and had recently bombarded the Emperor with suggestions, among others that he should take further action in China nearer to our sphere of interest, and that they were always working for a combination of Russia, France and Germany against England.

There was a special agent—an aide-de-camp—staying for a week at Homburg and pressing these suggestions on the Emperor.

I said that I did not see that there was anything to be done. Either Count Hatzfeldt's language was that of the Emperor, in which case the matter was ended; or it was not, and in this case it was for the Emperor to make the next move.

Baron Eckardstein said that he should be returning to Homburg in a fortnight and should then see the Emperor.

Eckardstein may have been totally misled, but his story throughout was almost as far as possible from representing his versatile master's real thoughts and desires. Of that fact we have had ample evidence, and the further proofs will be conclusive. Nor did poor Eckardstein, despite his parting words at the Colonial Office, venture on any further attempt to approach his Emperor. This chapter has had two purposes. First to perform the duty of giving in full all those hitherto unpublished papers of Chamberlain's which are relevant to the case. Secondly, to show what were then the real motives and the hidden springs of action. In this sense, so much has now been made clear that an unexpected epilogue of Chamberlain's first efforts for an Anglo-German alliance will admit of very direct though curious narration.

CHAPTER LIX

A TANGLED WEB: THE KAISER BETRAYS CHAMBERLAIN

(1898)

THE Prime Minister Returns—The Alliance: "Can We Get It?"—Two Temperaments—Salisbury on "Living and Dying Nations"—Sombre Moderation—Chamberlain's Rejoinder—The "Long Spoon" Speech—Appeal against Isolation—An Historic Departure—The World's Hubbub—Why William II. betrayed Chamberlain to the Tsar—Baffled Intrigue—"Two Power Attack" and Fresh Conversations—More News from St. Petersburg—A Study of the Kaiser and his Advisers—"Arbiter Mundi" and Nemesis—What Might Have Been.

I

THE Prime Minister returned after his absence at Beaulieu. To him Chamberlain at once communicated all the papers concerned, and stated his belief that some kind of alliance with Germany was desirable and feasible. The Prime Minister shared the wish but not the faith.

The letters ensuing show how incomprehensible, almost, to German minds, even to an observer so long resident as Count Hatzfeldt, must have been the cohesive elasticity of the British Cabinet system. They could not understand that underneath all Ministerial divergences and party dissensions, there was in free institutions, as operating in the singular island, a latent power of massive unity. The Prime Minister and Colonial Minister falsify the melodramatic accounts of their rivalry current in Berlin, Paris and elsewhere. Despite some innate differences of mind upon the business in hand they hold together.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Colonial Office, April 29, 1898.—Herewith are the notes of some very curious conversations I have had with the German ambassador and Baron Eckardstein.

You will see that in every case the interviews were sought by the Germans and the initiative was taken by them.

On every occasion I made it clear that I only expressed my personal opinions and could not speak for you or any of my colleagues. . . .

I have heard from the Governor of Ceylon that Prince Henry of Prussia spoke very freely to him as to his brother's wishes and entirely in the sense of Baron Eckardstein's report.

Recent experience seems to show that we are powerless to resist the ultimate control of China by Russia, and that we are at a great disadvantage in negotiating with France, as long as we retain our present isolation, and I think the country would support us in a Treaty with Germany providing for reciprocal defence.

I think such a Treaty would make for peace and might be negotiated at the present time.

But it is for you to say whether the matter should be pressed or allowed to drop. . . .

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

Foreign Office, May 2, 1898.—Hatzfeldt came to see me this afternoon. He referred to his interviews with you and Balfour; but he did not go far into the subject of them. He made a great many general reflections on the advantages of a better understanding between Germany and England; but was careful to add, at fixed intervals, that nothing could be hurried, and that until matters were ripe no action could be taken.

His business was evidently to throw cold water. He hinted that if we wished for an alliance we must prepare the way for it by amiability in other matters. But he did not insist on this idea—and I was not certain whether it was meant to be the key to the rest of his observations or not. . . .

I quite agree with you that under the circumstances a closer relation with Germany would be very desirable; but can we get it?[1]

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

House of Commons, May 2, 1898.—I am very glad to see your handwriting again and to know from Balfour's report that you have quite recovered your strength. . . .

[1] This letter corrects one mistaken assumption by the excellent editors of *Die Grosse Politik*, who state with surprise that Lord Salisbury never gave Count Hatzfeldt the expected early opportunity of explaining his conversations with Chamberlain and Balfour. See vol. xiv. First Part, p. 230, where the error occurs in a long footnote.

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If you thought it well I believe it would be quite possible to ascertain through Eckardstein whether the Emperor is determined to press the matter, and if so to let him know that the initiative must come from him.[1]

Eckardstein told me that the Emperor did not always hear the truth from his surroundings, but was told only as much as they thought necessary for their purposes. I suppose this is often the case with autocrats, and I hope that the Emperor of Russia is not aware of the lies that Count Muravieff has told in his name.

On the day following these last remarks, Chamberlain makes a further note. "After the Cabinet Lord Salisbury spoke to me about the question of a German agreement. I told him that the Emperor expected a mutual defensive arrangement for our respective possessions. Of course this included Alsace-Lorraine in the German case, and I assumed Egypt and Afghanistan in ours. He said that if Eckardstein came to me again I might say that the Government were prepared to regard the idea favourably. He agreed that any agreement should be a public one."[2]

II

But we know from other sources that the Prime Minister was not sanguine but sceptical and justly. That he welcomed at all Chamberlain's intervention in foreign affairs is far too much to suppose. But nothing of its kind is more diverting than the discomfiture of the fond notion in Berlin that sheaves might be garnered by cultivating Salisbury and Balfour at the Colonial Secretary's expense. The German ambassador had allowed himself to imagine that the Prime Minister's supposed jealousy of a little-loved colleague might be stimulated by adroit insinuation and turned to profitable account. Instead, Lord Salisbury's manner towards Hatzfeldt is less cordial.[3]

[1] Chamberlain may have heard from the German Embassy of Bülow's latest communication (April 30,1898) to Hatzfeldt: "The utmost we can do is to leave on Chamberlain the impression that no insuperable obstacles stand in the way of a later understanding". But Bülow repeats that, as things are, a further discussion of the idea of alliance is undesirable. *Grosse Politik*, xiv. First Part, pp. 227-229.

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum", dated House of Commons, May 3, 1898.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 235 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, May 15, 1898).

In one conversation he made abruptly a remark never forgotten nor forgiven in Berlin. "You ask too much for your friendship."[1] Soon after, when the talk touches the eternal question of "small concessions" to Germany, he observes as bluntly that one side cannot always be giving and the other taking.[2] What in the Prime Minister were choleric words would in Chamberlain have been accounted flat blasphemy. The same comparison applies to their public utterances. A speech by Salisbury excited wide attention, but another by Chamberlain, a few days later, raised a storm.

For some months the Prime Minister had not been heard on a public platform. He now broke silence in a sombre address to the annual meeting of the Primrose League. Refusing to admit any defect in the Government's policy in China, he rather rasped than soothed the obstinate discontents of the nation. Otherwise his remarks were a study in contrasts. On the one hand he appealed for scrupulous restraint of language in international controversy. On the other hand, he lacerated the feelings of several nations:

> We know that we shall maintain against all comers that which we possess, and we know, in spite of the jargon about isolation, that we are amply competent to do so. But that will not secure the peace of the world. You may roughly divide the nations of the world as the living and the dying . . . the weak States are becoming weaker and the strong States are becoming stronger . . . the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying, and the seeds and causes of conflict amongst civilised nations will speedily appear."[3]

At that moment the macabre theory seemed to include Spain and Portugal, for instance, perhaps France and Italy, as well as China and Turkey, amongst the "dying nations". This drastic application of Darwinism to foreign policy was not apt to abate predatory appetites amongst the stronger peoples. Chamberlain held another opinion as to the kind of utterance required at that juncture. For all Salisbury's pointed reference to "the jargon of isolation" Chamberlain was resolved to speak out

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 230 (conversation of May 11, reported in dispatch of May 15, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 236 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, May 20, 1898.

[3] Albert Hall, May 4, 1898.

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on that very theme. He took it as his affair to prepare public opinion for what he thought inevitable, however it might be delayed—a fundamental change in the traditional conception of foreign relations. And the more did he consider this to be his duty because of the part he had been playing behind the scenes.

III

On May 13 he addressed a gathering of his townspeople and made what was remembered as the "long-spoon speech". This performance, as usual—but the more so because of the stir to which he meant it to lead—was carefully proportioned. Nearly half he devoted to domestic policy before passing to foreign. A single fling at Muravieff's duplicity gave the speech the nickname it still bears. His real theme was that which he was the first statesman of front rank to raise in public—the growing disadvantages and dangers of isolation.

> Now, I want, according to my manner, to submit to you a plain statement of the situation as it appears to me. Ours is a democratic government. We gain all our strength from the confidence of the people, and we cannot gain that strength or have that confidence unless we show confidence in return; and therefore, to my mind, there is no longer any room for the mysteries and the reticence of the diplomacy of fifty years ago. You must tell the people what you mean, and where you are going, if you want them to follow. . . .
>
> Now the first point I want to impress on you is this—it is the crux of the situation—since the Crimean War, nearly fifty years ago, the policy of this country has been a policy of strict isolation. We have had no allies. I am afraid we have had no friends. . . .
>
> All the powerful States of Europe have made alliances, and as long as we keep outside those alliances—as long as we are envied by all and suspected by all—and as long as we have interests which at one time or another conflict with the interests of all—we are liable to be confronted at any moment with a combination of Great Powers. . . . We stand alone. . . .

He extolled the rising strength of Imperial feeling overseas; and appealed for Anglo-American friendship in a glowing passage

better reserved for later pages.[1] Then he passed to the breakdown in China and the method of Russian acquisition, and brought in the parable about the devil and the spoon, and used it to heighten his warning against isolation.

As to the representations that were made and repudiated as soon as they were made, as to the promises which were given and broken a fortnight after, I had better perhaps say nothing—except that I have always thought it was a very wise proverb, "Who sups with the devil must have a very long spoon". . . .

If the policy of isolation which has hitherto been the policy of this country is to be maintained in the future then the fate of the Chinese Empire may be, and probably will be, hereafter decided without reference to our wishes and in defiance of our interests. And if, on the other hand, we are determined to enforce the policy of the open door, to preserve an equal opportunity for trade with all our rivals, then we must not allow our Jingos to drive us into quarrel with all the world at the same time, and we must not reject the idea of an alliance with those Powers whose interests are most nearly approximate to our own.[2]

It is possible that he never made a platform speech more characteristic of the whole man, with his mingling of practical force and sanguine impulse, at this phase of his national ascendancy. Intuitive prescience that isolation could not last, daring initiative, telling idiom, show again why he was a master of democratic leadership such as Salisbury never had been and Balfour never would be. Yet though his realism was keen and far-sighted in the main respects concerning his country and the Empire, and though his enthusiasms were sound in spirit, he has his ardent illusions about the near possibility of what he desires and he does not reckon enough with the disappointing factors. In this he is still a young man; with more coldness he would have had less power.

His wife wrote next day: "I am still thrilling with the excitement of Joe's speech last night. There is a confession for you! I think it was the most impressive I have ever heard him deliver

[1] This passage is quoted fully in the next chapter dealing with Chamberlain's action in the Spanish-American War.

[2] Birmingham Town Hall, May 13; *Times* report, May 14, 1898.

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both in subject and manner."[1] Amongst the Unionist rank and file the spectacle of the Colonial Minister standing up to Russia, as they said, was vastly popular.

Many moderate Conservatives were full of misgiving. Liberals scandalised, delighted the more in the opportunity to attack. Lord Kimberley in the House of Lords demanded the Prime Minister's opinion of the speech. The Prime Minister replied that he was unfurnished with the text! Full debate in the House of Commons clattered after the Whitsuntide recess. "What have we done or suffered", exclaimed Asquith, "that we are now to go touting for allies in the highways and byways of Europe!" The Opposition charged that the Colonial Secretary was at variance with the Prime Minister. Chamberlain with sardonic resource carried the war into the enemy's camp while cheers volleyed from his own side. "I have not resigned. I am not cast out by my colleagues. I am not rejected by the Prime Minister. . . . Perhaps they [the Opposition] are thinking of some Government—I have heard of such a Government myself—in which the Prime Minister was said to be not on speaking terms with one of his principal colleagues; and neither Prime Minister nor principal colleague resigned."[2]

IV

We are more concerned with the effect abroad. The bruit was world-wide. No speech for years had caused a like commotion. Foreign comment in many capitals—Berlin, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, New York, St. Petersburg—filled through several days many columns of *The Times*. Warm response came only from some leading American journals. Russian execration was natural and violent. In Germany the less inspired press was derisive over the assumed exposure of British weakness, and the semi-official organs were ambiguous. There was no support, needless to say, for the idea of an alliance with Britain, though there was increased expectation of advantages from that embarrassed Power. Typical criticism in Paris described the Colonial Secretary as a "civilian Boulanger", who had made a speech against Lord Salisbury. Fears, however, that France might be aimed at

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, May 14, 1898.

[2] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lviii. col. 1426 (House of Commons, June 10, 1898).

nearly caused a panic on the Bourse. But our neighbours kept their heads while shooting their epigrams. A West African agreement still lingered, as we saw, but the "long-spoon" speech stimulated at last desire for a speedy settlement.

Inevitably Chamberlain had said too much for the diplomats and too little for the peoples. He could not explain what had been going on behind the scenes in London—and he himself had no suspicion of what was being done and planned behind some scenes elsewhere. The atmosphere of the time was charged partly with false excitement, partly with just foreboding. We must recollect again that the Prime Minister, a few days before, had uttered thoughts more deeply offensive to large portions of mankind than Chamberlain's pungent words. The elegy on the "dying nations", so far as it concerned Europe, was universally interpreted as addressed to the Latins. Spain's remnants of empire were being swept away at that moment; many supposed that Portugal's possessions, as ancient and far wider, must pass to other hands. France, owing to Panama scandals, bubble Ministries, the Dreyfus fever, declining birth-rate, and yellow-backed novels, was widely held to be decadent. Just as Germany began to think that, for different reasons, the British were decadent.

V

The diplomatic sequel is a sorry episode never known to Chamberlain. Both parties to the Anglo-German negotiations had stipulated for strict secrecy. On the British side it was preserved. Within little more than a fortnight after the "long-spoon" speech the Kaiser betrayed Chamberlain to the Tsar. From now onwards dynastic incapacity would be more dangerous to the world than popular impulses or parliamentary weaknesses.

What had led William II. to an act of perfidy which happily proved to be as futile as discreditable? The only hint at a clue, and this is doubtful, seems to be contained in a dispatch from Hatzfeldt. It refers to the occasion when, according to him, Lord Salisbury is not only obstinately unresponsive to the reiterated German desire for some colonial acquisitions but adds that "one side cannot be always giving and the other taking".[1]

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 235-238 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, May 20).

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Hatzfeldt goes on to suggest that Chamberlain is probably the real obstacle.[1] The Kaiser annotates that Salisbury is under the thumb of "Brummagem Joe", and adds at the end:

> Chamberlain has Salisbury completely in his pocket. Salisbury might do business with us. Chamberlain *not*, rather would rob us without parley. It is the easier for him to strengthen against us the noble Lord's resistance because he knows how very pro-French Salisbury is at the bottom of his heart.

These are the fantasies of ill-informed suspicion. What was at the bottom of His Majesty's own heart?

For, a few days later, the Emperor took his header into thick water. First he drew up a memorandum which was meant to be methodical and searching, but shows him too well as a Machiavelli *manqué*. Seeking to measure his alternatives as between England and Russia he succeeds in distorting both sides of the case. In his communings with his own self, he cannot help deceiving that self. His inmost mind is a convex mirror. What could be more tragic? He decides against England on a hypothesis of naval rivalry which none but himself could create; and chooses Russia for purposes which he himself is destined to ruin.

THE KAISER'S SECRET MEMORANDUM

1. *Combination*

The proposition arises from anxiety with respect to the consequences of our Navy Law. In the beginning of next century Germany will dispose of an armoured fleet which in conjunction with similarly enlarged fleets will bring England into real danger. Hence the intention either to force us into alliance or to annihilate us like Holland aforetime, ere we have become strong enough.

2. *Combination*

Were England *bona fide*, then the association would be excellent for the future and our enormous trade[2] secured. How long Russia and Gaul, through dread of this combination, will maintain peace is always ques-

[1] Yet on the very day before this was written Baron Eckardstein said in a letter to Chamberlain: "Count Hatzfeldt as well as Herr von Bülow in Berlin were altogether extremely pleased with your suggestion that in any difficulties which may arise between the two countries an open discussion should take place and that any sort of pin-pricks should be avoided" (May 19).

[2] "*Kolossaler Handel.*"

tionable though not impossible. On the other side if we refuse England and make a solid connection with Russia—the antecedent condition of refusal—England eventually may detach Gaul, and together their pressure may be crushing, above all totally destroying our whole trade, which up to now is defenceless and which Russia cannot help to defend. Yet on land, with our whole military power, eventually reinforced by Russia, we would be able to destroy Gaul and save our Reich.[1]

Thus miscalculating the factors on every hand the German Emperor decided for "2. *Combination*", which was never to be realised. In the dream of bringing it about the German Emperor now tried to sell to the Tsar the frank English advocate of an alliance with Germany. Chamberlain, not actually named, is unmistakeably indicated, while the truth of the negotiations which had taken place is disfigured with an extravagance which defeats itself. The letter to Nicholas II. was in English.

THE BETRAYAL—"WILLY" TO "NICKY"

Berlin, 30, V. 1898.—*Private and very confidential.*—DEAREST NICKY, With a suddenness wholly unexpected to me I am placed before a grave decision which is of vital importance to my country, and which is so far reaching that I cannot foresee the ultimate consequences. . . .

About Easter a Celebrated Politician *proprio motu* suddenly sent for my ambassador and *à brûle-pourpoint* offered him a *treaty of Alliance* with England! . . . After Easter the request was *urgently* renewed but by my commands coolly and dilatorily answered in a colourless manner. I thought the affair had ended. Now, however, the request has been renewed for the third time in such an unmistakeable manner, putting a *certain short term* to my definite answer and accompanied by such enormous offers showing a wide and great future opening for my country that I think it my duty to Germany duly to reflect before I answer.

Now before I do it, I frankly and openly come to you, my esteemed friend and cousin, to inform you, as I feel that it is a question so to say of life and death. . . . I am informed that the Alliance is to be with the Triple Alliance and with the addition of Japan and America, with whom pourparlers have already been opened! . . .

Now as my old and trusted friend I beg you to tell me what you can

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 239, 240. The German editors state that this memorandum is beyond doubt the Kaiser's, though available to them only in a duplicate, unsigned and undated.

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offer me and will do if I refuse. . . . With this letter, dearest Nicky, I place my whole faith in your silence and discretion to *everybody*. . . . May God help you to find the right solution and decision! It is for the next generation! But time is pressing, so please answer soon!—Your devoted friend, WILLY.

P.S.—Should you like to meet me anywhere to arrange by mouth I am ready every moment at sea or on land to meet![1]

This for sure is amongst the inimitable epistles of history. The description of another offer "now" made, with magnificent inducements and an urgent summons to decide, is without a particle of truth. The anguished enquiry to beloved "Nicky" about payment for devotion needs no remark.

The Tsar by comparison was a great gentleman and well advised. One might say, adapting an image from Disraeli, that Nicholas II. poured a cold douche out of a "golden goblet". Reciprocating fervent sentiments he offers nothing. He disconcerts his dear friend by remarking that he too a few months before had received tempting proposals from England.[2]

Without thinking twice over it, their proposals were refused. . . . It is very difficult for me, if not quite impossible, to answer your question whether *it is* useful or *not* for Germany to accept these often repeated English proposals, as I have not got the slightest knowledge of their value.

You must, of course decide what is best and most necessary for your country. . . .—Believe me ever, your loving cousin and trusting friend, NICKY.[3]

In other words Russia too could wait. Though desiring the best relations with Berlin, the Tsar assuredly did not intend at any time to exchange the French alliance for dependence on Germany. Seldom have the tables been so neatly turned upon baffled intrigue as now in the astounded Kaiser's case as a result of his betrayal of Chamberlain. The ironies are far from ceasing

[1] *Briefe Wilhelms II. an den Zaren*, edited by Professor Walter Goetz, pp. 309-311.

[2] This was true, as already mentioned. It may be convenient to quote again here *British Documents*, vol. i. p. 8, January 25, 1898, where Salisbury suggests that a friendly demarcation of respective "spheres of influence" in the Chinese and Turkish Empires would give Russia very extensive advantages.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 250-251 ("Nicky" to "Willy", June 3, 1898).

on that account. William II. hoped above all that his own violations of confidence would be respected with exemplary good faith.

Many German writers have been led into honest belief that there had been some double-dealing by England with St. Petersburg and Berlin. There is not a shadow of foundation for that view. Lord Salisbury's proposals for a full settlement with Russia had been made, as we know, in January and made in vain. The Colonial Secretary's conversations with the German ambassador were opened at the end of March. Chamberlain kept confidence inviolate; nor as between Germany and Russia was there ever one moment of double-dealing by the Prime Minister, nor by any other British statesman. We need not say that this was our virtue. The other method was not our way.[1] Meanwhile, and for long yet, the Kaiser's real conceptions of the naval and general future were not divined on our side; and pursuit of closer relations between Britain and Germany was not abandoned.

VI

The Prime Minister, agreeing with the purpose, thinks that the Colonial Secretary has not pursued it in a practised diplomatic manner.[2] The sort of manner we may remark which ended, after all, in a World War. In technique Bülow and Holstein were the pink of professionals.

Chamberlain is unrepentant in his idea that in the new and perilous circumstances of the world something more is required than lagging caution and correctitude of deportment. Though disappointed by the delays, he is still staunch for the alliance, regarding himself as its pioneer and champion. Hatzfeldt's news and gossip flow on. "Mr. Chamberlain's attitude is likely to exercise a decisive influence on the further development of things between the two countries, since undoubtedly he enjoys great influence in the Cabinet." He is virtually indeed the autocrat of the Cabinet as to matters belonging to his department.

[1] Even a German historian so balanced as Professor Meinecke seems to think that there may have been some "untrustworthiness" on England's part, though venial by comparison with the Kaiser's. *Geschichte des deutsch-englischen Bündnissproblems*, pp. 99-100.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 240 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, June 2, 1898).

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In those matters nothing can be gained without him. Unless offended by excessive demands, he may prove not unyielding. Lord Salisbury visibly ageing has lost much of his energy. For these reasons Chamberlain's power in the Government is rising. Generally, if Chamberlain's ambitions succeed, the head of the Ministry will readily share the credit; if the Colonial Secretary breaks his neck, the Prime Minister will not break his heart.[1]

None the less, the ambassador firmly reported that for cold-blooded reasons both the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary were agreed in desiring a political understanding with Germany. Discussions were resumed in a manner not hitherto fully explained. In conversation, our ambassador in Berlin, Sir Frank Lascelles, told Bülow "that Mr. Chamberlain had spoken in good faith and that in England he was gaining more and more influence on the course of events". Bülow, seemingly in a new mood, did not repel in principle the idea of alliance, but he put a searching question, perhaps meant to be fatal. Were Russia antagonised, what extent of support could England guarantee against an attack on Germany by the Dual Alliance?[2]

Sir Frank Lascelles brought that question home with him and discussed it, just a week after his talk with Bülow, at a luncheon given at Prince's Gardens by the Colonial Secretary. The date was Saturday, June 18. Other Ministers present were Mr. Goschen, Lord George Hamilton, Mr. Chaplin and Lord Selborne. These bare facts appear in the Chamberlain Papers, but they contain no record of what passed then or later. Instead, we find ourselves dependent on a paraphrase by the Kaiser himself of a conversation held after the British ambassador's return to Germany.[3] The talk took place on August 21 at Homburg, where William II. was visiting his mother the Empress Frederick. He then hears that at the luncheon two months before at Prince's Gardens, the Colonial Secretary, with the

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 241-247 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, June 3, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 253-255 (Bülow's memorandum, June 11, 1898).

[3] Sir Frank Lascelles refers to this interview in his letter to Balfour dated August 23 but adds nothing to our knowledge. "I could only repeat my conviction that a sincere desire for a good understanding existed in England which in some influential quarters went so far as a wish for an alliance which should be strictly defensive and should only take effect if either party were attacked by two Powers at the same time. His Majesty seemed impressed by this idea, and said it was the first he had heard of it" (*British Documents*, vol. i. p. 101).

assent of his Ministerial colleagues then present, had declared himself ready for a defensive alliance between England and Germany on the basis that they would make common cause if either were attacked by two Powers together.

The Kaiser in his haste exclaimed to Sir Frank Lascelles that this proposal was utterly unknown to him. A few months before it had been his own, according to Eckardstein. For the mere moment William II. seems—or feigns—to be attracted by the idea, though forgetting that it had been his own. At the same time he reduces it to absurdity by a mental reservation. If the *casus fœderis* arises and England has the Dual Alliance on her hands he will attack France but not Russia. Next day he orders the gist of his conversation with the British ambassador to be telegraphed to the Tsar.[1]

The Wilhelmstrasse made doubly sure. Holstein gave his opinion that nothing could be so foolish as to excite the suspicion of Russia by any kind of general entanglement with England. With the same object Bülow, whose worse method was personal flattery, wrote a notorious letter in what German writers have called his Byzantine style. War between England and Russia must come some day by elemental necessity. "As I see it Your Majesty's greatest success in the conversation with Lascelles is that the English at last have had their eyes opened on two chief questions: that on the one hand, Your Majesty *pour les beaux yeux de John Bull* never will pull English chestnuts out of the Russian fire; and that the English could give no practical help to Your Majesty in case of a war with Russia." By a judicious management of England, while not for a moment compromising relations with the Tsar, William II. can make himself supreme amongst the rulers of the earth.

> I hope to God . . . that thus in full independence towards both sides, Your Majesty, on the eightieth birthday of Her exalted Majesty Queen Victoria, will be present as *arbiter mundi*.[2]

We see that a political system is implied in these words of sycophancy and delusion. They mark the end of Chamberlain's first effort for an Anglo-German alliance. From now on

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 333-338 (August 22 and 23, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* pp. 339-342 (Bülow to William II., August 24, 1898).

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William II. was at the top of his vanity and his dreams. This *arbiter mundi* began to prepare his own ultimate catastrophe by his policy towards Britain and Russia alike. Partly as a Christian pilgrim, partly as a commercial traveller, the Kaiser now journeyed to the Holy Land, and there became an enthusiastic patron of the Mohammedans. He is misguided enough to write letters to the Tsar not only both bombastic and tactless but transparently insincere.

VII

On one hand he is already entering upon the pro-Turkish design—with the Bagdad railway for its axis [1]—bound in the long run to antagonise Russia, who already looks at it askance. On the other hand he seeks by every means to instil prejudice against England in spite of his undoubted desire to shine at the eightieth birthday of his grandmother. It is the time of the Fashoda crisis. He longs for war between France and Britain. From Damascus he protests that France by shirking a conflict after Marchand's noble expedition has proved herself a "dying nation".[2] And from Baalbek he sends further words for the Tsar which are suppressed by the affrighted Wilhelmstrasse: "You will own that the situation is extremely dangerous and has been rendered more so through the most unhappy and untimely retreat of the French from Fashoda, which has given a strong impetus to British greed and unscrupulous overbearing". In this same connection he for the third time discloses to Nicholas II. utterances supposed to have been made in confidence by Chamberlain.[3] Yet presently he will exclaim that Britain by failing to force a conflict with France has let slip a golden opportunity which will never return.[4]

He cannot comprehend why these nations by fighting each other do not make him *arbiter mundi* at once. Far the strongest man about him is Admiral Tirpitz, whose naval policy "will bring England into real danger"; while the territorial policy in the Near East and Middle East crosses what Russia regards as her line of destiny; and France is both contemned and under-

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 464-466 (Marschall to Hohenlohe, April 9, 1898).

[2] *Briefe Wilhelms II. an den Zaren*, pp. 58-68, November 9, 1898.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 394-397 and pp. 387-389.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 425.

rated. So William II. and his counsellors—Bülow, brilliant but shallow and deceptive; Holstein, the complete logician arguing from false premises; Tirpitz, the inflexible sailor, who saw in his work for the future glory of the sea-service the soul of patriotism —these together began to break up on all sides the Bismarckian system to which the Hohenzollerns owed their empire.

It seems impossible to separate the responsibilities of these men or to reconcile their accounts of themselves and of each other. Holstein has been represented in terms of melodrama as the evil genius of German foreign policy. This theory will not bear investigation. One of the most singular figures who ever played a historic part behind the scenes, Bülow's *éminence grise* had a more pervasive influence than Richelieu's Father Joseph. His power depended upon good qualities as well as bad. This secretive being and slaving bureaucrat was a typical Prussian in his devotion to his work and his country. For tireless industry, veteran experience, definite knowledge, for exhaustless ingenuity in supplying diplomatic arguments and sharp phrases, there was none to compare with him. Morbidly suspicious—Bülow calls it "pathological mistrust"—priding himself on his preternatural discernment, his complicated crankiness of mentality could see nothing simply or straight. For other reasons Holstein was a dangerous and dreaded man. Evading responsibility while giving advice, sensitive and vindictive, he became when offended the Iago of intrigue, who had helped to undermine various persons in high position, including Bismarck himself. He might turn against anyone, and on that account was feared by all the Wilhelmstrasse and throughout the German diplomatic service abroad.

Yet it is a fallacy to suppose that Holstein's separate initiative was either originating or decisive in any of the great matters. The old Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, was pro-Russian. Admiral Tirpitz was anti-English. Bülow, at this phase, interpreted the complex of influences in the manner most seductive to his master. The chief reasons for rejecting the British proposals were the Kaiser's own—his plan for a great fleet; his wish to keep Britain weak meanwhile; his dream of holding the balance between Britain and the Dual Alliance; his proper concern to preserve good relations with Russia and so to avert from the

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Reich a war on two fronts; and his corresponding desire that the Tsardom, diverted from Europe, should become more deeply engaged in the Far East instead of being checked there as Chamberlain proposed.[1]

VIII

By contrast Chamberlain has left a statement, and it is like a flow of fresh air after a vitiated atmosphere. Not knowing what we know, he believed still and long afterwards in the Kaiser's personal sincerity. Not for communication to anyone but to clear his own mind he sets down the synopsis of a conceivable Anglo-German treaty. The document is not dated, but it must have been just after Bülow's *arbiter mundi* letter and the Tsar's universal appeal which led to the first Hague Conference on peace and disarmament. The Colonial Secretary postulates for England and Germany mutual guarantees against two-Power attack. He contemplates a treaty for seven years and sketches out heads of discussion, enumerating every single point likely to arise. Since his early manhood this tabular method of analysing complicated questions had been his habit.

One sentence in the synopsis is more arresting to-day than all the rest. He asks himself: "Could any proposal be made for general disarmament by the two contracting Powers to the other European Powers?" We shall realise still better in ensuing pages that during these negotiations his attitude towards Germany was inseparable from his feeling towards the United States and from what is now called English-speaking solidarity. He had conceived a system to assure peace, at least for a generation or half a century, by the only means then available—an overwhelming combination cemented by real interests and kindred sympathies.

One must think it a pity that Chamberlain at the height of his originating force was not Prime Minister. During the later

[1] Bülow in his elaborate self-justification asserts that when brought into counsel by the Kaiser and Tirpitz on the naval question he foresaw the political difficulty: "We ought neither to challenge England nor yet ally ourselves to her. Between that Scylla and this Charybdis lay the danger-zone which we had to traverse. . . . Our political relations with England would become extraordinarily difficult: if we allied ourselves to England by treaty that would, more or less, mean that we would renounce the execution of our naval plans, for they would scarcely be reconcileable with a really definite Anglo-German alliance based on mutual confidence" *Memoirs* (English translation), vol. i. pp. 112-113.

months—the day is not given—of the affairs described above, he was the chief guest at a dinner given by John Morley. Mr. J. A. Spender, who was present, remembers one passage of this conversation. Talking without precaution as always, the Colonial Secretary said there was only one position worth having in public life and that was the position of Prime Minister. There you could do what you liked if only for a short time. But for the disruption of the Liberal Party, he went on, he would have been Prime Minister; now that has gone for ever and for the rest of his life he is driven back to the second best.[1]

Again and again he exerted over the Cabinet more than the usual power of a Prime Minister. That intermittent sort of domination could not replace for some of the greatest purposes, imperial and social, the continuous ascendancy which may be wielded by a born leader and organiser at the head of a strong Government. Salisbury, deeply and justly distrustful of the temperament of William II., was ready, though always within limits, to compromise with both France and Russia in the interests of national safety as well as of general peace; but the aggressive tone as well as the insistent pressure of German diplomatic habit repelled a proud though steady statesman. That in the circumstances human wit could have contrived any firm settlement between Britain and Germany is not certain, and in view of the Kaiser's naval plans may seem improbable. Yet the only hope of solution was on Chamberlain's lines. He was right to make the attempt and right afterwards to repeat it. Salisbury was far more intimately acquainted with the details of foreign affairs. Chamberlain saw the simplicity. The Prime Minister could still speak of "the jargon of isolation". The Colonial Minister knew in his bones that before very long Britain one way or the other would have to escape from isolation and secure allies on some side. For three years more, and for cogent reasons, as we shall see, he preferred the Teutonic connection, which he and the great majority of the country as yet thought more "natural". Had he been Prime Minister in 1898, while there was still a little time, his vigorous representations of the great alternative might have convinced Berlin and prevented Anglo-German antagonism from breeding immeasurable woe.

[1] *Life, Journalism and Politics*, by J. A. Spender, vol. i. pp. 72-73.

CHAPTER LX

ANGLO-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP—A TURNING-POINT

(1898)

THE Cuban War and the Highbury Household—John Hay—Danger of British Policy taking the Wrong Turn—Chamberlain's Saving Protest—He sends White House its First News of the Battle of Manila—The Campaign for English-speaking Unity—"The Next Ten or Twenty Years"—Warning to the House of Commons—A Study of Instinct in Statesmanship—Chamberlain's Thoughts on the New Era of Danger—"The Key to World-Peace?"—Unknown Factors and Modern Judgment.

I

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IN the midst of the transactions just recorded the war between the United States and Spain broke out, and extended at once from the Caribbean Sea to Far Eastern waters. This struggle stimulated imagination and armaments. It seemed to show that all policy henceforth was more or less part of world-policy. Through late spring and summer the Chamberlain family pulsated with excitement and enthusiasm. At one moment British policy seemed near the brink of one of those errors which are irreparable.

The Colonial Secretary fortunately—as we noted in the Venezuelan transactions—knew more of the United States at first hand than any British statesman of first rank. He not only understood the American temperament: in some ways he shared it. Since his marriage at Washington nearly ten years before, letters usually passed every week between the households on opposite sides of the Atlantic. We recollect his main part in settling the Venezuelan quarrel and his arguments with Secretary Olney for frank intercourse between the two English-speaking Powers; for a friendly habit of dealing; for co-operation,



Photo *Fred Hollyer*

MARY E. CHAMBERLAIN, 1902

After the portrait by J. S. Sargent, R.A.

even alliance, when causes of humanity were at stake and the spirit of civilisation outraged as in the massacres of the Armenians.

Presently Cuba became the Crete of the Atlantic. Some months before the United States went to war the Colonial Secretary, as "Minister for Gibraltar", was approached rather in the Spanish interest by his old friend of "Fourth Party" days, Sir Henry Drummond-Wolff, who had become our ambassador at Madrid. His sympathies, like those of all the European diplomats at that capital, were with the Queen-Regent, fated to cares and forebodings and now approaching her most cruel ordeal.[1] Chamberlain avoided discussion. In February the *Maine* exploded in Havana harbour.

A familiar and delightful visitor at Prince's Gardens was the American ambassador, John Hay—"one who loves England and is beloved", as a friend said. When recalled to Washington to become Secretary of State a few months later he said himself, "the fun is over". Just returned from Egypt and Greece, Hay called upon the Chamberlains towards the end of March, and made no secret of the gravity of his fears. The author of *Castilian Days* was the last man not to feel all the pathos of the Spanish tragedy; but unsubduable insurrection in both cases had made it as inevitable for Spain to lose Cuba as for Turkey to lose Crete. The devastation of the former island by the rival forces had to be brought to an end. "The war in Cuba must stop." In the United States this had become the irresistible feeling, not created by the sensational press, though inflamed by it.

On April 20, 1898, Congress declared and President M'Kinley approved that the people of Cuba "are of right and ought to be free and independent". An American ultimatum decreed the expulsion of Spain. In Madrid the Queen-Mother had to choose between abject surrender and hopeless conflict. Surrender would mean revolution and the loss of her child's throne. It was the agony of a devoted woman and a proud nation. The majority of the Cabinet in Madrid advised, in the spirit of all Spanish history through two thousand years from Numantia to Saragossa, that disaster was preferable to dishonour.

Chamberlain had been received some years before by Maria

[1] Drummond-Wolff to Chamberlain, November 12, 1897.

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Cristina in audience, and knew, like John Hay, all that the Spanish agony meant. But he knew also that when once this struggle was engaged there could be only one issue. Not only did he think the American cause humanly sound, despite journalistic disfigurements. He was antagonistic to all rumours of European intervention. That the British Foreign Office might compromise itself, though only by moral meddling without a notion of physical interference, never occurred to him until he was startled by the danger.

II

In London the Foreign Office, as in the earlier phase of the Venezuelan difficulty, was not quite alive to American realities. In Washington one of our best diplomatists, Sir Julian Pauncefote—by a fault soon and nobly repaired—seriously misjudged the requirements of his task.

Yielding to the pleas of Austria-Hungary, Britain made a first mistake, though a mild one, by associating herself with the other European Powers in an appeal for peace and accomodation. By the British ambassador himself, as *doyen* of the diplomatic corps, the appeal was presented to President M'Kinley, who courteously indicated that the platitudes were belated and irrelevant. Chamberlain's comment was, "Well meant but it won't do". When hostilities seemed imminent, when nothing but a miracle could avert them, when the war party was raging in America and ready to raise the cry of "European interference", this step by the Powers could serve no good purpose. But Pauncefote's prominence in the affair satisfied the better part of American opinion that nothing had been intended beyond platonic entreaty, friendly though useless.

A week later, however, when Congress demanded immediate war, the Washington representatives of the six European Powers assembled—on the formal initiative of the British ambassador as *doyen*. They decided to telegraph to their Governments advising a "moral protest", which at that moment would have amounted to a declaration by Europe, Britain included, that the American cause was not justified. It must be made very clear here that practical action in any shape or form

against the United States never was contemplated for a single second. But the Foreign Office, where Arthur Balfour was still deputising for the absent Prime Minister, and where Pauncefote's opinion carried deserved weight, was inclined to associate itself with the moral protest. The Austro-Hungarian Minister in London pressed for British adhesion. It would have been madness at that moment.

Chamberlain was at Birmingham when the news of this possibility reached him. He saw a gulf yawning. Instantly (April 16) he sent a telegram to Balfour:

Am convinced Message will do no good and will be bitterly resented. Americans insist that Spain shall leave Cuba. Nothing less will satisfy them. Spain will rather fight. Message practically takes part with Spain at critical juncture and will be so understood in America and this country.

Though fearing that mischief past mending may have been done already, the Colonial Secretary follows his telegram by an earnest letter to the Foreign Office:

CHAMBERLAIN TO BALFOUR

Highbury, April 17, 1898.— . . . Your instinct was much better than Pauncefote's "experience and judgment"—and I am afraid our interference will do harm.

The American position may be right or wrong, but it is a very clear one—and to ask them in the name of the Concert of Europe (*absit omen!*) to alter it will probably be regarded by them as offensive.

Hitherto public opinion in the States has gratefully recognised that we have been more sympathetic than the other Great Powers—now I fear we shall be held to have thrown in our lot with them.

It was not too late. British policy in Washington was promptly revised and shaped in Chamberlain's sense. Sir Julian Pauncefote withdrew from a risky association with his diplomatic colleagues. That withdrawal killed the project of European expostulation against American resort to arms. The other Powers dared not act by themselves, and they had little heart in the business. At this particular juncture even the Kaiser kept his head, though tempted to lose it a little later. It must be stated here that he was

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maligned when rumours were afterwards spread in the American and British press that Germany had tried to work for active intervention by the six Powers.[1]

None the less, this episode was a very memorable turning-point in Anglo-American relations, and opened a new era of warmer and more settled friendship than had been known since the separation.

A very few more of these April days brought the outbreak of war. It was evident at once that Chamberlain once more had surely anticipated public feeling. Britain's attitude thenceforward was not only one of dissociation from the European Powers. It meant "Hands off"—as intimated sufficiently in Manila Bay later, when Captain Chichester drew in his ships as a sign to the German admiral that the White Ensign must be reckoned with as well as the Stars and Stripes. Both must be challenged or neither. By this time, German policy had lost its momentary wisdom; the Kaiser longed to acquire more naval bases in the Far East; and was intensely opposed to the possession of all the Philippine islands by the United States.[2] Chamberlain's pro-Americanism in this war from beginning to end was a still more far-reaching service to the two peoples than his clear-sightedness in the Venezuelan tangle.

In the autumn of 1896 his conciliatory directness had drawn from Richard Olney himself an emphatic statement—and a true one—that the Cleveland ultimatum had been caused not by American hostility but by seeming British indifference to American feeling; and that "nothing would more gratify the mass of the American people than to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with England in support of a great cause".[3] That was not to happen until the Englishman was dead and the American just dying; but Chamberlain now had the satisfaction to know that Richard Olney was speaking in public of Britain as "our best friend", and of "a patriotism of race" amongst all the English-speaking peoples. In Anglo-American feeling, from that moment, there was a wonderful change, and if it led the Colonial Secretary too far as a practical dreamer, let us excuse him. Over

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 19-30. Especially the dispatches during April 1898 from the German ambassador in Washington, Dr. von Holleben.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 39 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, May 18, 1898).

[3] Richard Olney to Chamberlain, from Boston, September 28, 1896.

sixty, near the grand climacteric, he was unquenched; and to his excess of faith in the possibility of what ought to be, as he conceived, he owed all that he did and much that he missed. CHAP. LX. ÆT. 61.

III

The first signal event of the struggle enabled him to render a pleasant little service to the United States. When Dewey on May Day crushed the Spanish squadron in the Bay of Manila, the Colonial Secretary had earlier and better information than President M'Kinley. It came in the shape of a telegram from the Governor of the Straits Settlements, followed next morning by a more detailed account. "We did the press", said Chamberlain, rejoiced that his department was ahead of the newspapers. His news, as it came, he sent on at once to the American Embassy, and John Hay cabled it to President M'Kinley.

The Colonial Secretary's feeling about the significance of America's entry into world-politics was, for him, almost ebullient. He believed that the American naval victory in the Far East foreshadowed, as in fact it did, a moral pressure and at need a practical force, which would prevent the dismemberment of China and maintain the "open door". He did not merely welcome the rise of American power: he gloried in it.

After Dewey's battle at Manila, he determined to make at the first public opportunity the strongest proclamation of Anglo-American friendship. The chief passage of the comprehensive speech incidentally mentioning the devil and the spoon was not the satire on Muravieff but the fervent outburst in praise of the United States and of English-speaking brotherhood in world-policy. The more definite the co-operation of the two peoples "the better it will be for both and for the world". Their alliance, if so much might ever come, would be a saving force of civilisation. If to draw closer together the British Empire itself was our first duty, what was the next?

It is to establish and maintain bonds of amity with our kinsmen across the Atlantic (*loud cheers*). They are a powerful and a generous nation. They speak our language, they are bred of our race (*loud cheers*). Their laws, their literature, their standpoint on every question are the same

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as ours; their feeling, their interest, in the cause of humanity and the peaceful development of the world, are identical with ours (*cheers*). I do not know what the future has in store for us, I do not know what arrangements may be possible with the United States, but this I know and feel—that the closer, the more cordial, the fuller and the more definite, these arrangements are with the consent of both people, the better it will be for both and for the world (*loud cheers*). And I even go so far as to say that, terrible as war may be, even war itself would be cheaply purchased if in a great and noble cause the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack should wave together (*loud and prolonged cheers*) over an Anglo-Saxon alliance . . . it is one of the most satisfactory results of Lord Salisbury's policy that at the present time these two great nations understand each other better than they have ever done since, more than a century ago, they were separated by the blundering of a British Government.[1]

His enthusiasm and his hope alike were reciprocated by some influential newspapers and voices across the Atlantic. There was clamant opposition, to say the least, amongst those wide elements of the American people—though then not so large a proportion as now—to whom the word "Anglo-Saxon" by itself could not make a racial appeal. The Irish question alone, for one thing, was a large obstacle in his way. But he himself had worked better than any statesman at that juncture to create the new friendship between the two peoples as a whole. He stuck to his guns. When his whole conception of the foreign policy of the future—in the sense of departure from isolation as a doctrine—was attacked in the House of Commons by the full force of an Opposition rarely so united, his reply, though a masterly debating effort, was far abler than that description alone would suggest:

We have sought alliance with Russia. . . . We have failed, and although I do not believe for one moment in absolutely permanent alliances or in absolutely permanent enmities . . . so long as you are isolated, can you say that it is not possible, can you even say that it is not probable, that some time or another you may have a combination of at least three Powers against you? . . . It seems to me that you have to look forward to the possibilities of the next ten or twenty years, and now is

[1] Speech at Birmingham, May 13, 1898.

the time to decide how you will meet the contingencies which are evidently ahead. As I said in my speech, I do not advise alliance any more than I rejected it. I only pointed out the consequences of rejecting it, and the advantages which might result from accepting it.

But, with one exception I admit . . . I desire, most earnestly desire, a close, a cordial and intimate connection with the United States of America. . . . Well, nothing in the nature of a cut-and-dried alliance is at this moment proposed. The Americans do not want our alliance at this moment. They do not ask for our assistance, and we do not want theirs.

But will anyone say that the occasion may not arise, foreseen as it has been by some American statesmen, who have said that there is a possibility in the future that Anglo-Saxon liberty and Anglo-Saxon interests may hereafter be menaced by a great combination of other Powers? Yes, Sir, I think that such a thing is possible, and, in that case, whether it be America or whether it be England that is menaced, I hope that blood will be found to be thicker than water.[1]

One who listened and was entirely unsympathetic towards his case calls him on this occasion the "peerless debater". Students of modern history will be more struck by other qualities. Was he not more fore-sighted or more fore-instinctive than anyone hearing him on that summer's day could suppose? He conceives enormous things. They happened, though not in the shapes he surmised. He speaks of the possibility of a Three-Power combination against this country, if we decline to depart from isolation; and he asks the House of Commons to look ten or twenty years ahead. Less than seven years later, the Kaiser felt sure that against Britain he had secured, by his treaty with the Tsar at Björko, more than a Three-Power combination[2]—prevented then not by isolation but by our *entente* with France. Within less than the twenty years with which Chamberlain reckoned in the summer of 1898 Britain and America were together after all during a World-War. How brief a time in such matters "ten or twenty years" seems now, though at the moment to the bulk of the good House of Commons he might almost as well have spoken of astronomical futurity.

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lviii. cols. 1434-1437 (House of Commons, June 10, 1898).

[2] *Briefe Wilhelms II. an den Zaren*, pp. 373-376 ("Willy" to "Nicky", July 27, 1905).

IV

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Through the months after the close of the Cuban War he pursued his Anglo-Saxon theme with the same faith and fire. As at Manchester:

> I rejoice still more, at the change that has taken place lately in our relations with the United States. They stand to us in a different relation from that which is occupied or can be occupied by any other people. They are our kinsfolk and we shall never forget it. . . . I know of a hundred reasons why we should be friends. I know of none why we should be otherwise. I believe that has been the true feeling of this country towards the United States for many years. We have been perhaps misunderstood on the other side of the water. Now, happily, that cloud has disappeared. . . . Our imagination must be fired when we contemplate the possibility of cordial understanding between the seventy millions who inhabit the United States of America and the fifty millions of Britons which inhabit the United Kingdom and the Colonies of the Queen. A combination of that kind would be a guarantee for the peace and the civilisation of the world.[1]

The whole of this book has shown hitherto, and must show to the end, that he was always concerned with the future and never was satisfied with the day, no matter how much he put into it. We can now see his conception as a whole. The idea of an Anglo-German alliance was only part of it. He felt generally that the affairs of nations were entering upon an era of tremendous change. It was his conviction that Britain, Germany and the United States could preserve peace indefinitely; and he doubted whether, for that purpose, any lesser or other combination would avail in the long run.

V

If we are bound to search the weaknesses of this general scheme, let us weigh the merits. The chief weakness was one not yet possible for Chamberlain nor any other British statesman clearly to discern. Of the inwardness of Germany's new naval policy and of the minds of William II. and Tirpitz, Bülow and Holstein, he knew nothing. He would learn. The

[1] Manchester, November 15, 1898.

Wilhelmstrasse abhorred nothing much more than political intimacy between Britain and the United States, and gave orders to work against it in America.[1]

Another fact is that nothing could draw America herself at that time into any preventive combination whatever. She would only be brought into association some day by necessity in the midst of colossal hostilities. But the merits of an idea in itself are not diminished because part of mankind is not ready for it, or because another part follows different assumptions and threads the way to disaster. Could the Colonial Secretary's dream have been realised, Russia could not have encroached until she brought about her own epoch-making overthrow by Japan; Germany would have restrained Austrian action in the Balkans, as not only Bismarck intended but even Bülow meant at first; Italy would not have been detached from the Triple Alliance. German naval expansion might have been moderated —though this is harder to suppose—by the assurance in another manner of political and commercial safety. But we must not pursue imaginings.

Instinct, and it is far from a reproach, chiefly dictated Chamberlain's extraordinary course of action and advocacy. What was the worth of his instinct? The easiest criticism will say that he—like many thinkers then, as well as emotionalists—was so unduly possessed by apprehension of the balance of the whole world being overturned in China, that he ceased for the time to see other questions in proportion. The answer is that events in the Far East did play the capital part—though otherwise than he expected—in leading up to the World-War by throwing back the weakened Tsardom on the Near East after defeat in Manchuria.

It will be objected again that the ardour of his "Anglo-Saxonism" was excessive. True, but there was something in it.

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 49, July 6, 1898. Richthofen, on Holstein's instructions, to Hatzfeldt. The important passage runs: "For England an alliance with the United States and with Japan would create an absolutely ideal situation, ensuring this group for years the mastery of the seas while the other partners would leave the English a free hand in Africa. It is thus almost hopeless to bring the English statesmen to any *voluntary* renunciation of this grand purpose. England will only become available for other political combinations when her present hope of an Anglo-American alliance is shattered. To frustrate this hope we shall have to set ourselves to work not in England but in America."

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One chief thing he hoped from Anglo-American understanding was gained. John Hay, after leaving the American Embassy in London to become Secretary of State in Washington, was the exponent of an American policy which demanded the "open door" in the Far East and arrested the dismemberment of China.

CHAPTER LXI

"THE KEY OF SOUTH AFRICA"—PORTUGAL'S HERITAGE

(1898)

CHAMBERLAIN and the Portuguese Colonies—Financial Needs and Political Dangers—The Short Route to the Transvaal—Delagoa Bay and the Railway—"The Key of Peace in South Africa?"—Chamberlain's Negotiations with Soveral—New Plans and High Hopes—Germany forbids the Banns—Joint Action or None—Extent of German Demands—A Stubborn Struggle—Salisbury and Chamberlain—For Compensation Germany abandons the Boers—The Portuguese Possessions and the Secret Treaty—A Barmecide Feast—Futility and Recrimination—Chamberlain on Alliance with Equality.

I

SOON we shall have to return to South African affairs in an uninterrupted narrative from Milner's appointment as High Commissioner to the outbreak of war. Meanwhile the Colonial Secretary, Salisbury and Balfour were involved in Anglo-German transactions of another kind from those already related. Difficult dealings, brought to success just before the rupture with the Transvaal, had a strong bearing on the South African question. Germany is willing to revoke the spirit of the Kruger telegram and to abandon the Boers on terms; but she insists on the price of her neutrality.

These intervening negotiations were full of friction with recurrent hints of menace. At the outset, they concerned chiefly the future of the Portuguese possessions, then as neglected as spacious. Was not this, at least for all colonial purposes, another case of a "dying nation" according to Lord Salisbury's fears? When the last fragments of the empire of Philip II. had just vanished, was it reasonable to think that the larger remainders of the empire of Emmanuel I. would or could survive? *Real-*

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politik at the Wilhelmstrasse thought not, and wishes fathered the thought. It was supposed that Portugal very presently would fall into liquidation; that the distribution of her overseas assets would be the result of dire financial straits at Lisbon. Chamberlain adheres to his greater proposal of Anglo-German combination, and, though not actually renewing it, seeks to lead up to a renewal.

II

Delagoa Bay, in any case the most important of the maritime outlets of the Transvaal, was the only one not in British possession. From its port, Lourenço Marques, ran the shortest railway route from the sea to Johannesburg and Pretoria. British control under lease or by purchase outright might offer our best chance of settling the whole South African question without war.

In an earlier generation, curious to say, we had refused the Bay when we might have had it for nothing.[1] When no one could foresee that the place would ever become a focus of world-policy, Portugal stepped in. After subsequent dispute her claim was fully confirmed in 1875 by Marshal MacMahon's award. But Britain obtained the right of pre-emption should change of control ever be contemplated, and Portugal gave an unqualified assurance never to cede or sell to any third Power. The idea of a railway to the Transvaal was already the subject of eager projection. There were long difficulties owing to the determined struggle of the Boers to bring the line under their own auspices, and to prevent themselves from being bottled up by British influence, direct or indirect. To all enterprise which might have that effect, President Kruger's opposition was dogged, ceaseless and natural. Free contact with the sea at this shore had been one of his dreams since childhood.

The concession, however, was obtained at Lisbon in 1883 by an American citizen MacMurdo, and he succeeded at length in raising the necessary funds in London by forming an English Company. By every means Boer antagonism continued to stir up trouble for MacMurdo and his British shareholders. Pretoria struggled to get the contract transferred. When construction up

[1] A local chief had actually ceded it to the British Crown in 1823, but in 1859 Sir George Grey's report against acquisition was final.

to the Transvaal frontier was nearly completed, the Portuguese, heedless of warnings from Britain and the United States, seized the line by armed force on June 25, 1889, and annulled the concession. Her Majesty's Government demanded redress. MacMurdo had died, but on behalf of his widow a parallel demand was made by the United States.

Lisbon gave way and agreed to submit the case to the arbitration of Swiss jurists at Berne. That tribunal, at the point reached in this narrative, had been sitting for years, but was thought to be not far from the conclusion of its labours. It had long been certain that Portugal would be called upon to pay heavy damages. It seemed as certain that Portugal from her own resources could not pay.

To meet the Berne award she might have to raise money upon her colonial assets.

Hence the tense politics of the affair while the Berne Award impended. In the event of any change of control over the Bay and the railway, Britain's preferential claim would be asserted at all costs. On the other hand, in return for effective though indirect control Pretoria was ready to find any money for Portugal.

Another factor might become more serious. For several years, the German Government, working closely with the Boers, had intimated that Delagoa Bay must not fall under British control. On this point German public opinion was inflamed. There had been angry exchanges on the subject between the Wilhelmstrasse and Lord Rosebery's administration.

We see why this question was never far from Chamberlain's thoughts during his first years at the Colonial Office. As early as July 1896 he was in correspondence with the Rothschilds, who had undertaken to ascertain whether there was any likelihood that Portugal would vend or let this small wedge of territory between the sea and the Transvaal. Any project to sell Delagoa Bay outright would assuredly overthrow the monarchy at Lisbon. But, on very liberal terms, a lease might be manageable.

In 1897 there were several interviews at the Colonial Office between Chamberlain and M. de Soveral, then the accomplished Portuguese Minister in London and still affectionately remembered by all who knew him.[1] An especial favourite of the Prince

[1] The principal conversations were on May 10, May 29 and June 18, 1897.

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of Wales—as after when the heir-apparent reigned as King Edward the Seventh—Soveral was no ordinary man. He was a diplomatist of as much prescience as vivacity, a devoted servant of his own country and a most faithful friend to ours. As Salisbury once remarked to Chamberlain, William II. detested Soveral as "our friend and therefore his enemy". Portugal warmly desired both a large loan and a guarantee of her colonial possessions by Britain. But the Lisbon Government could not be induced by all Soveral's efforts to commit itself to the essential pledge that in the province of Lourenço Marques no further concessions would be given to the subjects of any third State. They were afraid that this would leave them no option but to give British concessions, and that this sacrifice of their freedom would gradually sap the colonial sovereignty which it was their passion to preserve.[1]

Hence, during the glittering season of the Greater Jubilee, these first discussions at the Colonial Office led to nothing. In the spring of 1898 they were resumed with brighter prospects. After the occupation of Kiao-chau, and well-informed reports from Berlin of the Kaiser's zest for more colonial acquisitions, German solicitude for the future of the Portuguese heritage was regarded in Lisbon with lively alarm.

III

In renewed conversations with M. de Soveral the Colonial Secretary examined all aspects, financial and political. He offered a choice of plans, none of them niggardly.

By the middle of June the energy of optimism was encouraged by the great agreement with France on the Niger and the supposition that the proposals for alliance with Germany were rather suspended than rejected. Chamberlain had high hopes of agreement with Portugal. Between ourselves and our oldest ally the "ancient treaties" of Charles the Second's time and later were to be renewed as a guarantee of the integrity of Portuguese possessions.[2] The British loan was to be large enough—Lisbon

[1] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 45-46: Foreign Office Memorandum on the Anglo-Portuguese question in South Africa.

[2] Treaty signed at Whitehall, June 23, 1661. Secret Article: "that his Majesty of Britain . . . shall promise and oblige himself, as by this present

wanted £8,000,000 at 3 per cent. This would leave a useful margin after paying off the floating debt as well as providing for any indemnity to which Portugal might be made liable by the Swiss arbitrators.

In return there would be joint management of Delagoa Bay, the harbour and railway. In the areas adjacent, no further concessions were to be made without our concurrence. For the Queen's Navy Britain was to have the use of all Portuguese ports, especially as coaling stations, in time of war. And above all, in case of a South African struggle, we were to have temporary control both of harbour and railway.

This was no small project. With regard to it the Colonial Secretary worked in full harmony with the Prime Minister. The High Commissioner in South Africa was kept informed of what so nearly concerned him. Milner wrote:

July 5, 1898.— . . . I look on possession of Delagoa Bay as the best chance we have of winning the great game between ourselves and the Transvaal for the mastery in South Africa without a war. I am not sure indeed that we shall ever be masters without a war. The more I see of South Africa the more I doubt it.[1]

When the Colonial Minister and Soveral had brought matters to the promising point, Berlin got wind of the procedure. German diplomacy charged bull-like into the negotiations and destroyed them. This was done with the temporary support of France, by working on the fears of Lisbon. The arguments of the Wilhelmstrasse were broad and brusque. Germany must be consulted before any change in the *status quo* could be tolerated. The Kaiser conceives impossible visions of compensation. Acquisitions on both sides of the African coast with sundry islands on the way to the Far East, including at least one of the Philippines.[2] Lisbon is threatened with international control of its domestic finances, which Salisbury is determined to resist. But this threat is supported by France, though she knows well how to maintain her reserve when asked whether she will not now

Article he doth, to defend and protect all conquests or colonies belonging to the Crown of Portugal against all his enemies as well future as present . . ." (quoted from Chamberlain's copy of the Treaty).

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 267-268.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 249 (Bülow to William II.).

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abandon her negative attitude at the time of the Jameson Raid and join with Germany on all coming colonial questions.[1]

Hatzfeldt reports upon his representations in London. "My impression to-day from Lord Salisbury's whole demeanour is that in this question also he leaves the lead to Chamberlain and shrinks from standing in his way." William II., with hopeless misunderstanding of the working of British government, exclaims: "This is a political question; Salisbury must settle it, not Chamberlain".[2] A few days later the German ambassador tells the Prime Minister that if England lays hands on Delagoa Bay without giving Germany satisfaction there will be a tremendous row—*un tapage extraordinaire*. Berlin, at need, will not shrink from joining with other Powers against Britain's position in Egypt. In effect Salisbury is warned generally that unless he shows himself more compliant he must expect German antagonism everywhere.

Chamberlain and Salisbury were equally willing to come to some reasonable understanding with Berlin; and equally they detested the minatory tone of German diplomacy. The Colonial Secretary's purpose is at a later stage to meet Germany's claims and meet them liberally. Denying her present right to interfere, he insists that Britain and Portugal first must make their own arrangements. He urges Lisbon not to be intimidated by Berlin and Paris. Repeatedly in meetings with the Portuguese Minister, who personally agrees, he stresses these views. "I am afraid that if the present opportunity is allowed to pass it may never recur."[3] It never did. He urges that prompt courage is the right course even in the interests of that subsequent friendly settlement with Germany which he recognises as indispensable.[4]

Lisbon is of another mind. And not at all through mere lack of pluck to stand up to Berlin and Paris. The Spanish cause in the war with the United States came to final catastrophe in these very days. The Portuguese were the more sensitive and more wary on the subject of foreign interference with their wide

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 267 (Bülow to Münster, June 18, 1898).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 262 (Hatzfeldt to Wilhelmstrasse, Kaiser's note, June 14, 1898).

[3] Chamberlain to Soveral, July 4, 1898.

[4] Chamberlain's memorandum of his interview with de Soveral, July 6, 1898.

heritage. Germany was dreaded in Lisbon, but Anglo-Saxonism, to say the least, was not beloved. At last, in the middle of July, Soveral had to announce the collapse of the negotiations. Portugal abandoned every idea of a loan on colonial security from the British or any other Government. Instead she would try to raise sufficient money on her home revenues.[1]

Downing Street and the Wilhelmstrasse thought she could not do it. But she could do it and she did.

German diplomacy, by the challenging method fatally characteristic of the Kaiser's regime, had made another blunder. He and his advisers, by thwarting Chamberlain's plan, which would have provided for their interests at a second remove, frustrated their own purpose, as will appear.

IV

The Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary agreed none the less that as a second best it was advisable to face the discussion demanded by Berlin. One drastic general principle was accepted to begin with. If Portugal relinquished from any cause her economic control or her political sovereignty overseas, her ancient colonial empire would be divided—virtually in the first case, formally in the second—between Britain and Germany. Everything, it will be noticed, pivoted on an "If". That little word from the beginning was differently interpreted by the two Powers. Amongst the more ironical transactions of all that age was this affair. It ended on the one hand in an elaborate secret treaty which was still-born; and on the other hand in official Germany's abandonment of the Boers. Through weeks of acrimonious bargaining the Kaiser and the Wilhelmstrasse, possessed by their own delusions, waged and won a fight for shadows. It was the Barmecide's banquet of diplomacy. The Germans compelled Lord Salisbury to play the host as it were—which he did with sublime scepticism—and to spread before them the richest of imaginary repasts.

The actual negotiation of this luckless treaty passed into the hands of the Foreign Office. Chamberlain stood aside, but was consulted at every turn.

[1] Chamberlain's memorandum of his interview with Soveral, July 15, 1898.

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Count Hatzfeldt asked for the reversion of two-thirds or more of the Portuguese possessions on both sides of Africa. This as a condition of leaving Britain what she really desired, the small southernmost wedge of Mozambique including Delagoa Bay. So far the German claim to compensation, should Britain exercise a legal right in a limited area, seemed to Salisbury exorbitant. But then William II. and his counsellors went further. They asked for the cession of existing British territories—for Walfisch Bay and for the "Volta triangle" of the Gold Coast on one side of the continent; on the other, for Blantyre and its surrounding part of Nyassaland, or alternatively our part of the Samoa group and the Tonga islands. And also, with an insistence puzzling to British statesmen, they stipulated for the reversion of the Portuguese half of the island of Timor in the East Indies. It was a place which our Admiralty when consulted thought pretty useless, though perhaps undesirably near Australia.

Chamberlain is adamant against "extravagant and irrelevant demands". To cede Blantyre, dear to the whole missionary movement and devoted to the memory of Livingstone, is impossible; the very request offensive. We may remark to-day that England might almost as well have asked Germany to cede Wittenberg. Walfisch Bay, if the Germans want it so much, they may have, perhaps, says the Colonial Secretary—if they give all Togoland for it. In any case, Cape Colony must be consulted. As for the Gold Coast and its Volta triangle, an old piece of British ground, the Germans ask a valuable something for a cool nothing. There is not a shadow of reason for their request and it cannot be entertained. We have sharp glints of his mind in its steely mood:

CHAMBERLAIN AND GERMAN CLAIMS

July 23, 1898.—*Memorandum to Salisbury.*— . . . Germany must offer territory or positions now in her occupation of equal value to anything in British possession which the Government of Germany may desire to obtain. The present action of the German Government appears to be inconsistent . . . with the reported desire of the Emperor for a friendly understanding with this country. . . .

July 25.—*To the Same.*— . . . Unless they [the Germans] are able to

modify the opinion they have formed of the value of their neutrality we must certainly look elsewhere for allies.

August 19.—*To Balfour* (*acting in Lord Salisbury's absence*).— . . . The only advantage to us is the assurance of Germany's abstention from further interference in Delagoa Bay and the Transvaal—in other words, we pay Blackmail to Germany to induce her not to interfere where she has no right of interference. Well! it is worth while to pay Blackmail sometimes. . . .

Without abandoning his own desire for a full Anglo-German understanding, he had come to loathe all the haggling and trucking of these particular negotiations. For a complete settlement and a sure connexion with Germany he would give much; to the policy of "squeeze" he would yield not a jot:

August 23.—*To Balfour*.— . . . Of course if this agreement could be assumed to be the beginning of a cordial understanding with Germany I should think the price paid was not too high, but I fear that the whole tone of the negotiations shows that Germany feels no particular gratitude to us for our sacrifices, and accordingly on all questions which still remain unsettled we are likely to find them as unreasonable in the future as they have been in the past. On these grounds I cannot be enthusiastic about the agreement, although I recognise that having gone so far we must loyally do our best to carry it through.

To this attitude of vigorous realism, ready to grasp a friendly hand but to resist a stamping foot, he will hold on for more than three years yet, never allowing temporary irritations to move him, until the Wilhelmstrasse leaves no doubt at all that "we must look elsewhere for allies".

V

As to the present—"Well! it is worth while to pay Blackmail sometimes!" That was a word of singular bitterness. What he meant was that we had given up our former freedom to exercise independently our right of pre-emption over Delagoa Bay and over the railway to the Transvaal; and that we had done this under pressure of continual German hints that it was the price of their neutrality in the event of a British conflict with the

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Boers. He agreed none the less that this game, though he hated it, was worth the candle.

There had been a hitch at the last. The British Government disliked bringing in Timor. But the Kaiser became personally excited and obsessed by Timor. To prevent a rupture it had to be included amongst his imaginary reversions.

The strange secret treaty between two Great Powers about what share of a mirage Germany should possess was concluded after more than two months of unpleasant altercation. It is better to reserve for a moment the discussion of its terms. Meanwhile, two subjects are a curious study—the passages from the German archives dealing with the supposed relations of Chamberlain and Salisbury; and with the formal abandonment of the Boers by the Kaiser and the Wilhelmstrasse for the sake of a castle in the clouds.

William II., who prided himself on his personal acquaintance with English affairs, was the more misled by the superficiality of his knowledge. More than ever he now chose to regard Salisbury as false and Chamberlain presumptuous.[1] We may take some glimpses from the dispatches of his ambassador.

HATZFELDT ON SALISBURY AND CHAMBERLAIN

July 11, 1898.— . . . In a rather obscure hint thrown out half in jest, he [Salisbury] seemed to indicate that difficulties are preparing for him owing to Chamberlain's devouring appetite in colonial matters. . . .[2]

July 20, 1898.— . . . As he [Salisbury] hears, the Kaiser has said to someone that Mr. Chamberlain is ready to make concessions to us and that he, Lord Salisbury, withholds consent. This is baseless, and the fact quite contrary. In confidence he added that the other Ministers (with Mr. Chamberlain at their head, as I was able distinctly to infer) were inclined yesterday to ask for our whole Togo colony as compensation for Walfisch Bay. At this I laughed aloud. . . .[3]

July 21.— . . . In my conviction Lord Salisbury would willingly give us Walfisch Bay. But Mr. Chamberlain will not, and the other Ministers fear that it would provoke attacks by the colonial jingoes in the House of Commons and amongst public opinion.[4]

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 262, 263, and 276 (marginal notes by William II.).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 290.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 301.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 302.

August 18.—At the end of our conversation I said to Mr. Balfour, "Shall I tell you why you want to leave out Timor? Merely because Mr. Chamberlain is anxious lest this concession to us might displease his American friends." He did not dispute this though, naturally, he did not confirm it.[1]

Nothing could be further from the fact than the last deduction, but it is typical. The Colonial Secretary in that connection never dreamed of the United States. British Ministers merely felt that the Kaiser's desire for Timor was a vaguely disquieting sign of erratic megalomania. When Balfour said, "I cannot imagine why they are so keen about Timor", Chamberlain was as mystified. When that island, too, was served up as the suppositious savoury of the Barmecide banquet, Bülow writes the *arbiter mundi* letter, and congratulates his master on having gained the desired prospect of a naval base "on the archipelago near Australia".[2] And he added, to grace the moral, "War between Britain and Russia will come some day by elementary necessity, and so much the sooner the less both sides believe that we want it".

Hatzfeldt, as we have noted before, is not a good psychologist. He is bound, as he values his position, to represent himself as superior in all diplomatic encounters. But he never has one flash of penetrating phrase when he describes any English Minister. He forms his judgment of the Government from the Opposition journals. We cannot take as evidence his impressions of what Salisbury meant when he only looked, and of what Balfour implied when he refrained from speaking. But Hatzfeldt does help to show what was Chamberlain's power in the Cabinet and the manner of its exercise.

Another aspect of German policy is more important for these pages. From an early stage of the Portuguese discussions the Wilhelmstrasse justified the extensiveness of its claims to compensation by the argument that for nothing less could Germany consent to withdraw her support from the Boers.

THE KRUGER TELEGRAM REVOKED

Berlin, June 22, 1898.— . . . In leaving the English a free hand regarding Delagoa Bay and its hinterland we take a step which will cause a

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 320. [2] *Ibid.* p. 340.

feeling of painful disappointment amongst the whole German people, because the Boers for years have become the object of a sentimental sympathy which, as in all cases of sympathy, cannot be combated on grounds of logic. Therefore the Kaiser's Government, if it is not to suffer *capitis diminutio*, must be in a position to show that its policy has not merely made renunciations but has gained evident advantages.[1]

July 16.— . . . Our public opinion, which in any case will not easily get over the more or less veiled abandonment of the Boers, would never forgive us if, without an immediately recognisable and fairly sufficient equivalent, we allowed the key of the Transvaal to fall into English hands. . . .[2]

July 23.— . . . The first point for Lord Salisbury is the absolute impossibility for us to put into the hands of England the fate of Delagoa Bay and of the Transvaal railway and with that the dominion over the Boers and of nearly all South Africa without being able to show simultaneously to our public opinion full compensation. . . .[3]

This note recurs like a *leit-motiv* through the German contention until the agreement is secured. It was the argument, needless to say, which carried most weight with British policy and induced Chamberlain at last—when he said, "Well! it is worth while to pay Blackmail sometimes"—to give his final assent to a repugnant transaction. But that even yet German neutrality in South Africa was quite fully secured, he did not feel, and he was right.

VI

The treaty was signed by Balfour for the Foreign Office, and by Hatzfeldt for Germany, on August 30, 1898. As everyone now knows, it provided, to begin with, for maintaining Portugal's "integrity and independence"—and then for the possible collapse of those objects. Compare the two contingencies. In the first case, Portugal, while preserving her political sovereignty over her colonial possessions, is expected to mortgage them heavily; whereupon those territories—comprising altogether nearly a million square miles on both sides of Africa and in

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 274 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 296 (Richthofen to Hatzfeldt).

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 304-306 (Richthofen's memorandum on a conversation with Lascelles).

Timor—would be divided by Britain and Germany into zones of economic influence elaborately demarcated. In the second case, the sovereign rights, passing away from Portugal at last, would be divided on the same territorial lines between Britain and Germany; these two inheritors being agreed to oppose any kind of intervention by any third Power.[1]

Delagoa Bay and the railway to Pretoria were to belong without question to the British sphere—on one condition. A Secret Note provided that in no circumstances was either contracting Power to obtain any partial advantage under the treaty without equivalent and simultaneous acquisition by the other. The treaty remained unpublished for over twenty years, until after the Great War.[2]

The immediate result and the further sequel justified Chamberlain's disbelief in the illusory bargain. Not one inch of British territory had been ceded for it. Not one inch of Portuguese territory did the Germans gain by it. The British press rang the big bells, and asserted that the Kaiser had thrown over the Boers. The Anglophobes in Germany denounced this interpretation, and demanded full publicity. It was impossible. There was more bad blood between the two peoples.

The very day after signature Count Bülow urges that both Powers shall take swift and silent action at Lisbon to secure that Portugal shall borrow only from them. This to exclude the financial intervention of France already justly feared and to confront that Power with the accomplished fact.[3] British statesmanship was neither eager nor able to force the issue in that manner. The Portuguese journals, in their turn, were swinging the alarm-bells. Just as Soveral had foreshadowed, when Berlin frustrated Chamberlain's original negotiations, King Carlos and his Ministers at Lisbon abandoned altogether the project of raising money by pawning their colonies. They arranged with French financiers for sufficient assistance on

[1] France was meant though so strongly urged at the outset by Berlin to make common cause against Britain on this and other questions (*Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. pp. 266-267: Count Bülow to the German ambassador in Paris, June 18, 1898).

[2] For Treaty and Convention with parallel texts in English and German, see *Grosse Politik*, pp. 347-355. The English texts are in *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 71-75.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 356-357 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, August 31, 1898).

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the security of home revenues. With this the bottom dropped out of the Anglo-German Treaty. When the Berne Award—one cause of these orgies of diplomacy—was given against Portugal, it amounted to much less than had been expected. It fell short of £1,000,000 and was promptly paid.[1]

VII

Somewhat more than a year after the signature of the abortive compact there was another engagement—not with Germany. In the autumn of 1900, the instrument erroneously called by Germans the Windsor Treaty—it had nothing to do with Windsor as the melodramatic version asserts—was concluded between ourselves and our ancient ally. It renewed secretly certain articles of friendship dating from 1642 and 1661. They pledged Britain to defend the integrity of all the Portuguese dominions, while binding Portugal to nothing more than benevolent neutrality in all circumstances towards this country.[2] This arrangement ultimately became known in Germany, with very mischievous results. There—as we are told by writers who mean to be sober—it went far indeed to destroy "faith in England's political honesty".[3] "It counted and still counts as one of the grossest examples of English perfidy", says a German commentator, who does not share the unpleasant opinion he records and warmly admires the subject of this biography.[4] Prince Bülow in several passages of his fluent *Memoirs* repeats the charge, and spices it with tittle-tattle. He speaks of "the perfidious duplicity with which, by means of the insidious 'Windsor Treaty', Britain had gone behind our backs to render ineffectual the treaty over the Portuguese colonies just concluded with us".[5]

For some subsequent purposes of this book it is necessary to refute this travesty. Does Bülow suggest in the name of honour that he had fixed his hopes on polite piracy?

[1] But the Award was not announced until March 1900—ten years after the Swiss tribunal had been constituted.

[2] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 88-99.

[3] Hammann, *Deutsche Weltpolitik, 1890–1912*, p. 65.

[4] Eugen Fischer, *Holsteins Grosses Nein*, p. 100.

[5] Prince von Bülow, *Memoirs* (English translation), vol. i. p. 327, but see also pp. 271-273, and p. 422.

There is no foundation for the charge of British bad faith. Salisbury, Balfour and Chamberlain had consented in view of the exaggerated visions of the Kaiser and his Wilhelmstrasse, to provide for the German hypothesis of a Portugal "falling to pieces". The earnest desire of British statesmanship to avert that dissolution was plainly and repeatedly declared. The Prime Minister in one of his first talks with the German ambassador on the matter said that by human reckoning Portugal might remain for centuries in possession of her colonies.[1] Hatzfeldt himself "repeated the earnest desire of the German Government, which he knew we shared, that the integrity and permanence of Portugal should be assured".[2] Balfour is the next witness:

> I stated with great emphasis, and more than once, that my chief anxiety was to spare the susceptibilities of Portugal. It was almost impossible to enter into an agreement such as that now contemplated without suggesting the idea that the contracting parties desired the eventual dismemberment of Portugal's Colonial Empire. So far as Her Majesty's Government were concerned, however, this was the direct opposite of the truth. It was our earnest wish to maintain the integrity of Portugal, and it was only in the event of our being unable to attain this result that ulterior eventualities had to be provided against. Count Hatzfeldt assured me that his Government were not less anxious than our own to maintain the *status quo* in South Africa.[3]

Hence in the first paragraphs of the Anglo-German Treaty itself the two Powers solemnly proclaimed their desire to preserve "the integrity and independence" of Portugal. Not only so. They went on immediately to make all the operative part of the Treaty contingent on Portugal's own "request" for financial assistance on the security of her colonial assets. This, after all, is the final answer to Bülow's charge of "perfidious duplicity". He imputes what he contemplated. Failing Portugal's voluntary request, what then? To substitute force would have been buccaneering procedure, reducing the Jameson Raid by comparison to a peccadillo. This never was, and never could have been,

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, p. 270. (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, June 21, 1898.)

[2] Chamberlain Papers. Salisbury's account, dated July 29, 1898, of a conversation with the German ambassador.

[3] *British Documents*, vol. i. p. 62 (Balfour to Lascelles, August 11, 1898).

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thought conceivable by any British Government.[1] For different reasons the Premier as much as the Colonial Secretary disliked the whole tenor of the affair and felt that, if known, it would be odious to public opinion.

German diplomacy had nothing to blame but its own aggressive short-sightedness. Had it not wrecked Chamberlain's own plan of economic action under the sovereignty of Portugal, that country might have accepted the British loan, and his next proposition would have invited Germany to share the practical advantages. Instead, the post-Bismarckian school with their usual felicity drove Portugal straight into the financial embraces of France, and killed the very Treaty which they had clamoured for and extorted.

VIII

Meanwhile there had been both loss and gain. Loss because we could no longer hope to acquire the key of the Transvaal, perhaps the key of peace in South Africa, by any independent arrangement with Portugal in the spirit of the right of pre-emption. Gain in two ways, and this without surrender of a single inch of British colonial territory. First, a long-standing danger had been removed—that Berlin or Pretoria, or both in concert, might obtain control of Delagoa Bay and the railway. Secondly, Germany had erased the Kruger telegram and pledged herself not to intervene further in the Transvaal question whatever happened. Chamberlain felt that this great moral advantage was not even yet quite guaranteed. To make assurance doubly sure required in fact another twelve months of hard and sometimes rancorous wrangling. It was the more advisable to overcome irritation with the Wilhelmstrasse and to keep a cool head. Especially at a time when the prospects of a settlement with either France or Russia were not yet improved.

In his Wakefield speech at the end of this fateful year 1898 Chamberlain recurred to his conviction that in spite of all rubs the British and German peoples ought of right to be friends.

[1] The first article begins: "Whenever either the British or the German Government is of opinion that it is expedient to accede to a request for an advance of money to Portugal . . ." (*British Documents*, vol. i. p. 71; and *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 347-348).

I would venture to say to some of our German friends who I think have been a little premature in their comments on this matter, that it is idle to talk of an alliance in which the advantage is all on one side. We do not want them to pull our chestnuts out of the fire, and we are not going to pull out chestnuts for them. We have ascertained . . . that there are very important questions affecting German interests as well as British interests in which we can agree to assist and not to thwart each other's policy . . . I think we may hope that in the future the two nations—the greatest naval nation in the world and the greatest military nation—may come more frequently together, and our joint influence may be used on behalf of peace and of unrestricted trade. . . . Meantime in the present state of the world the friendship of this country is not to be despised.[1]

In another passage he declared his frank desire for better relations with Russia as well, and for a peaceful solution with France:

I believe that an agreement with Russia is desirable and I would even say that it is necessary unless very serious complications are to be encountered. But I would go on and add that there are no insurmountable obstacles to such a friendly arrangement, and I believe it is quite possible to conciliate what we may call the reasonable ambition of Russia with the fixed and settled policy of this country to maintain equal opportunities in trade for all nations.

This latter interest, he added, was no less that of Japan, Germany and the United States; and a certain "very pregnant passage" in the recent message of the American President to Congress made it probable that in the future "at any rate we shall not stand alone as the guardians of the 'open door' ". Soothing some passions stirred up by the "long spoon" parable, the Wakefield speech made less noise in the world. That in the Reich it deserved more attention and friendliness than it received many thoughtful German writers confess.

[1] Wakefield, December 8, 1898.

CHAPTER LXII

THE PRICE OF GERMAN NEUTRALITY—WORLD-POLICY AND OUR "TWO-HEADED GOVERNMENT"

(1899)

GERMANY'S Two Motives—Neutrality and a Further Price—Samoa and German Feeling—Chamberlain and Australasian Feeling—The Tridominium and Civil War—Cecil Rhodes in Berlin—Mesopotamia as a Blessed Word—Deadlock in the Samoan Negotiations—The Kaiser denounces the Prime Minister to the Queen—Her Rebuke—Salisbury's Resistance—Delays and No End—A Bitter Crisis—Chamberlain offers Germany Two Plans—He ends the Deadlock—The Kaiser and our "Two-headed Government"—Bülow's Thanks to Chamberlain—South Africa and the "Public Advertisement" of German Neutrality.

I

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CHAMBERLAIN, unlike Balfour, might well feel in his bones that not yet was German neutrality firmly secured. Despite the late agreement concluded after so much pains, when improved relations were hoped for on our side and promised on the other, more embittered contention ensued. Arising unexpectedly, it concerned most a more distant part of the world. We might say that the big "globe" in the Colonial Secretary's room was kept spinning.

This fresh dispute continued up to the very outbreak of the Boer War, and for some weeks after. It became the more exacerbated as Britain's troubles thickened in South Africa. There were ceaseless jars and sharp crises. The Kaiser at one time threatened to withdraw his ambassador. At another Queen Victoria was astonished and incensed to receive from her grandson a railing attack on her Prime Minister. The antipathy between Salisbury and the Wilhelmstrasse was no longer veiled. Whether William II. would pay his long-arranged visit to Windsor

remained uncertain up to the very eve of that celebrated episode.

The quarrel, which seemed nigh insoluble until Chamberlain was invoked to settle it, began over Samoa. Those islands for ten years past had been under the triple and discordant control of America, Britain and Germany. Bülow writes in his plausible way:

> At the beginning of March 1899 a telegram informed me that, after lengthy controversies between the German, British and American Consuls in Samoa, British and American cruisers had bombarded Apia. At the same time German colonists had been illegally imprisoned. When this Job's messenger reached me I was in Flottbeck, and I returned at once to Berlin. I was awaited at the station by Holstein, who had come to tell me, in lively but, it seemed to me, simulated excitement, that my only way out of this awkward situation was to send in my resignation, after a brick like that had dropped on my head. I replied to the incorrigible crank, perfectly calmly, that that solution had much in it that attracted me.[1]

Not only had Bülow himself, under instructions, put out feelers towards Samoa long before. To the Kaiser and his Admiralty the uproar in Apia was as serviceable as the fate of his missionaries before the occupation of Kiao-chau.

II

Why, it will be asked, should German policy have been so especially interested in one famous little group of islands in the South Seas. The attraction is not hard to understand. The harbour obtained there by Bismarck as far back as 1879 was modern Germany's first colonial acquisition. On that account alone Samoa made a strong sentimental appeal. There were other reasons. It was a fair matter for pride that German commercial success was preponderant in the group, and that the Hamburg firm of Godeffroy had done most to develop its trade. Above all, for the Kaiser and Admiral Tirpitz it had become an object of desire both for itself and as a means of stimulating naval enthusiasm.

[1] Bülow's *Memoirs* (English translation), vol. i. p. 280.

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As the result of a conference at Berlin in 1889, America, Britain and Germany agreed indeed to establish a condominium, but otherwise never were agreed. From this unhappy regime Robert Louis Stevenson boded no good.[1] When the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898, just before the commotions belonging to this chapter, the German colonial school held that, as compensation, America's share in the Samoan group ought to become theirs. The Kaiser's Ministers wished Britain to help them to it. This was the occasion when Salisbury declined "to thrust his hand into a wasp's nest". But when Malietoa, the king of the islands, died, another disputed succession led to another civil war.

The protecting Powers were as openly divided as the natives. Through the early months of 1899 there were ugly squabbles between the whites. British and American officials and sailors acted together against the Germans, who, believing themselves altogether in the right, sought to carry matters with a high hand. At length Apia, the capital, was attacked by the adherents of Mata'afa, the claimant supported by the German representatives against a boy—kin to the late king—recognised by the other two Powers. British and American warships in impromptu alliance opened and continued a bombardment at Apia, and landed bluejackets. Some of them were killed, but German subjects and interests suffered.

This was the situation when Bülow was called back from his holiday in Flottbeck.

He does not mention that in accordance with the Kaiser's ardent desire for complete or predominant possession in the islands, discussion had been proceeding for months.[2] The Germans saw that the jarring condominium would have to be mended or ended. They first suggested partition of the group between the three Powers.

Chamberlain had always made it clear to his colleagues that Australia and New Zealand would not gladly accept the firmer establishment of Germany in the South Seas.[3] The British Gov-

[1] *A Footnote to History*, where the situation is vividly depicted.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. First Part, pp. 259-261 (June 8, 1898). *Ibid.* Second Part, pp. 567-675 (August 31, 1898, to November 1, 1899). *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 107-131.

[3] *British Documents*, vol. i. p. 110. On January 24, 1899, a formal communication from the Colonial Office

ernment put off the question. That it must be faced Berlin with increasing pressure began to insist when the civil war raged in the group, while Britain and America supported one candidate for the kingship, Germany the other. To Berlin, it soon appeared that nothing was to be got easily from Lord Salisbury, long since alienated by unpleasant hints whenever, as the Queen's Minister, he could not mould himself to the Kaiser's will.

Holstein at last enquired whether the Colonial Secretary might not be moved in Germany's favour. Surely Chamberlain must recognise how much England, by concluding with Germany the Portuguese convention, has gained in prestige, power and liberty of action for South African purposes.[1]

At first nothing comes of this. For weeks Chamberlain, racked and weakened by one of his severest attacks of gout, is very little in London. When he recovers and resumes political activity there are other impediments. He will not *travailler pour le roi de Prusse* on "particular questions" while Germany holds back on the great issue of alliance. Yet again, better than any other Minister, he knows how feeling in Australia and New Zealand is rising higher against German action and claims in Samoa. Finally, it is his last wish at this time to offend the Prime Minister by any avoidable interference with the prerogative of the Foreign Office.

III

At last the Colonial Secretary and the Kaiser's ambassador were brought together very privately by Alfred Rothschild at his own house. The meeting took place when chaos in Samoa was nigh the worst. The condominium had come to anarchy. Hatzfeldt began with complaints of Salisbury's irresponsiveness and emphasised the sharp risk to the general relations of the two Powers. Enmity between them must be the result if Britain and America continue to work together against Germany in

to the Foreign Office reminds Lord Salisbury of "the strong and legitimate feeling which exists in the Australasian Colonies against allowing the control of Samoa to pass into the hands of a foreign Power, owing to its position directly in the track of steamers from Australia and New Zealand to North America, or to the Central American Canal".

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 580 (Holstein to Hatzfeldt, February 24, 1899).

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Samoa. From Washington Sir Julian Pauncefote has suggested revision of the Samoa Act by a Mixed Commission, whose decisions to be valid must be unanimous, thus safeguarding the Reich. Chamberlain inclines to agree that this may be the best way out.[1]

The German ambassador adds that the talk lasted two hours and entreats that the Wilhelmstrasse shall try to prevent it from coming to Salisbury's ears. The Prime Minister does not budge. In a few days President M'Kinley regards with favour "the German proposition to send a High Commission to Samoa to settle all matters in dispute".[2] In Berlin, Salisbury, as often before, is now regarded as the villain of the piece, covertly more hostile than Chamberlain at his bluntest.

Then German diplomacy gave way to one of its accesses of violence, and threatened to turn the Samoa squabble into an international crisis. Bülow, instead of playing the smoothing part his *Memoirs* represent, gave dangerous advice to a receptive master. If England intends to disregard the German interpretation of the Samoa Act let the Kaiser withdraw his ambassador from London. "What is happening in Samoa is a new proof that overseas policy cannot be conducted without an adequate fleet." Applauding this congenial sentiment, William II. adds, "What I have preached all through ten years to those blockheads the members of the Reichstag".[3] Some days later Bülow actually telegraphs that, unless Salisbury alters his attitude, the Kaiser will break off diplomatic relations with England for as long as may be required to bring that country to its senses.[4]

It did not come to that. The wrangle had risen to this pitch because Salisbury insisted for a time that the mixed Commission in Samoa should work by majority rulings. Germany had reason to fear that this might mean, all through, British and American rulings against her. The Colonial Secretary had been strongly

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 585-587 (Hatzfeldt to Wilhelmstrasse, March 25, 1899).

[2] This was after the American ships had bombarded the ground behind Apia and damaged the German Consulate. The island of Upolu with its port, Apia, contained half the population of the whole group and was the centre of German commerce in this part of the Pacific.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 590-592 (Bülow to the Kaiser, April 1, 1899). He adds that the occasion should be used to make emphatic naval propaganda in the German press.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 602 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, April 11).

with the Prime Minister for majority decisions. The United States was of the same mind. When Hatzfeldt, desperately harried, saw that there must be an adjustment or a breach, he asked Rothschild to warn Chamberlain. The same day the Prime Minister wisely accepted the unconditional principle that operative decisions of the Samoan Commissioners must be unanimous.

As for Salisbury—writes Hatzfeldt—his earlier friendly feelings towards Germany have been changed; personal likes and dislikes play a great part in his nature; and though he may ignore an affront he never forgets it.[1] This ebullition is explained by the fact that the unfortunate German ambassador's own position, as he goes on to confess, is becoming very thankless in London. In failing health and spirits, driven and spurred by Berlin against his judgment, he can no longer expect to be received cordially at the Foreign Office as of old. In his heart he regrets the former days more than he dare allow either of his masters, the Kaiser or Holstein, to suspect.

By now, the Colonial Secretary's feelings about the methods and the manners of German diplomacy towards this country were often not different from the Prime Minister's. But shrewd handling was dictated in view of the South African situation. In the Samoan imbroglio nothing more than a respite had been gained, and it was short. Months of renewed discord began and came to more rigid deadlock. It fell to Chamberlain and no other statesman to resolve it in the end.

IV

There were remarkable interludes. One of them suggests like nothing else the range and spirit of the Imperial movement at that period. When it appeared that Salisbury might be very hard to move, Cecil Rhodes of all persons was expected in Berlin from Egypt. The Cape to Cairo route suddenly came into surprising connection with the Samoan quarrel. Hoping to extend his continental telegraph through German East Africa, Rhodes was approaching the Kaiser's Government for his own

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 606-607 (Hatzfeldt to Holstein, April 15).

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purposes. Might he not be useful for theirs? Before his arrival Holstein enquired:

> Is he a man with whom Compensation-politics on the larger scale can be discussed—that is to say, on matters settled with him, is his influence strong enough in England to drive them through even against Lord Salisbury's *vis inertiae*? On Moroccan questions could he command support? Could we get him for the idea of giving up Zanzibar in return for railway concessions, and such, on the [African] Continent? Could his influence make itself felt also in the handling of the Samoa question?[1]

Nothing in the German archives shows a more pathetic ignorance of the inwardness of British politics on the part of the man who for years was supposed in the Wilhelmstrasse to be a prince of experts in foreign affairs. Hatzfeldt replied, alas, that Chamberlain up to a certain point might listen to what "Sir Cecil" had to say in such matters; Salisbury not at all.[2] The Wilhelmstrasse was not convinced.

Rhodes arrived in Berlin towards mid-March and never was more masterly in pursuit of an object. The visit was partly grandiose, partly diverting. In more than one long conversation he fascinated William II. and made him feel like an Emperor of genius never fully understood till now. His Majesty said that all the desirable places were occupied before German colonial enterprise appeared. Rhodes said not so: the Middle East remained where empires had once flourished—by irrigation not war—and might again. It was the very dream of William II. Together they extolled the vision of the Bagdad railway: Europe and Asia would be linked by a mighty bridge across the Bosphorus. Through Mesopotamia, blossoming once more like the rose, the canals of Nebuchadnezzar would revive their fertilising flow. The delighted Emperor wished that the South African statesman were his Minister. Rhodes said afterwards with a twinkle that he knew he had won his own case when he uttered the magic name Mesopotamia and enlarged upon the glories of Nineveh and Babylon. In high spirits the mercurial Kaiser absolved him for the foible of the Raid. The immediate right of way for his telegraph was granted. When Rhodes held forth that

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 581 (Holstein to Hatzfeldt, February 24, 1899).

[2] *Ibid*, pp. 582-583.

the Cape to Cairo railway would be carried across the frontier of German East Africa in five years' time he was assured that all would be ready for him.[1]

As we know from other sources Rhodes for his part blandly promised to exert his whole influence in London, and especially upon the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary—over neither of whom had he any influence whatever—in favour of German aims in Samoa.[2] The results were nil. Chamberlain, it is true, dined with Rhodes at Eckardstein's house. Upon the policy of the former that meeting had no effect.[3] A few days later Hatzfeldt sent his warning:

London, April 22, 1899.— . . . I must take this occasion unfortunately to destroy an illusion which still seems to linger at least in our press. It seems to be thought, there, that Chamberlain in the Samoan question has been more favourably inclined to us than Salisbury. . . . Eckardstein, who saw him yesterday, found him in his whole attitude and language greatly changed towards Germany. Chamberlain used expressions like the following: "Last year we offered you everything and you would not have it, *now it is too late*." You see that we have not much to expect from this so-called friend.[4]

The Kaiser writes on the margin, "I never believed it".

But these ominous words "Too late", from that particular quarter alarmed Berlin as, no doubt, Chamberlain deliberately intended.

V

Bülow asks why does the Colonial Secretary say it is "Too late"? Germany's benevolent neutrality is not yet assured. It may depend on the present issue. Has not Chamberlain himself deplored dispute over "trumpery affairs not worth twopence to either of us"?[5] Then why not let Germany have what she wants in Samoa, considering that the British Empire owns near-by Fiji with its good harbour? While for Germany the

[1] Chamberlain Papers (Lascelles to Salisbury, March 15 and 16, 1899).

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 583 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, March 16, 1899).

[3] Eckardstein, vol. ii. p. 16 (April 17, 1899).

[4] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 612-613 (private to Holtein).

[5] Sane, steady Richthofen said that, apart from sentiment, Samoa was not worth the cost of the telegrams concerning it.

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name of Samoa is dearly associated with the beginnings of colonial enterprise. Just where goodwill might be expected open ill-will has been shown. The Colonial Secretary himself may not be to blame. That direct intercourse with him has been renewed gives Bülow lively pleasure. "I believe that Mr. Chamberlain, owing to his greater sagacity, is more open to reason than many other English statesmen, and to pursue the intercourse with him in any way that may seem to your Excellency apt and proper would altogether correspond to my wishes."[1]

So much had the view changed in twelve months since the powerful Englishman here appreciated—though perhaps only for the temporary purpose—was regarded as an ambitious schemer and a crude bourgeois, intruding upon that sphere of high policy where the lower orders, as the German jest has it, were barons.[2]

When conciliation on both sides might have lightened the atmosphere, William II. rushed in and threw back the settlement for months. His impulses were mingled. For one thing he had set his heart on Samoa, and an attempt to thwart him, as he thought, stung his animus against Lord Salisbury. For another thing it was the occasion of Queen Victoria's eightieth birthday, and his presence at that celebration had not been desired, though he was invited for Cowes week only two months later.

Under double irritation this temperamental grandson wrote to the Queen, as an addition to her pleasures in connection with her eightieth birthday, a letter now notorious. With unbridled temper, it attacked Lord Salisbury generally for his supposed arrogant disdain of Germany, and especially abused him for his endless obstinacy over a trifle like Samoa—"a stupid island which is a hairpin to England compared to the thousands of square miles she is annexing right and left unopposed every year".[3]

Deeply wounded but not withdrawing her invitation, the loyal Lady defended the head of her Government. She also enclosed

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 613 (Bulow to Hatzfeldt, May 6, 1899).

[2] "*Beim Baron fängt der Mensch an!*"

[3] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. iii. pp. 375-379, where the Kaiser's letter is dated from the original "Cassel 27 May 1899". It is dated "Neues Palais Potsdam 22 May" in *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, p. 615.

Lord Salisbury's own dignified reply. Again William II. had frustrated himself in the manner that would be his lot to the end. After an episode of this unseemly character, Salisbury was of all men the least likely to hurry. Nor did he. Instead he exerted quietly the utmost of his consummate skill in passive resistance, and carried it too far. By the end of August a real settlement seemed no nearer after six months at loggerheads.

At the end of August, Eckardstein went to Berlin. It was decided after long conferences at the Wilhelmstrasse once more to invoke Chamberlain. There was but one way to do it. He was still convinced that a British evacuation of Samoa in Germany's favour was almost prohibited by the bitter taste to Australasian feeling. The Kaiser's government at last consented to change the whole basis of negotiation in a way giving the Colonial Secretary more scope. Germany might relinquish Samoa altogether in return for ample compensation elsewhere.[1] War in South Africa might flame in a few weeks. William II. was determined to use this emergency and to make his projected visit to Windsor in the autumn conditional on results beforehand.

VI

The Colonial Secretary's chief purpose was to ensure in fact what was supposed to have been won in theory by the Portuguese Convention of just a year before—a "public advertisement", as Hatzfeldt then said to Balfour, of German neutrality. For some months, the German Government, with a sound view of its own real interests, had done its utmost by advice to Pretoria through the Hague to deter the Boers from risking war. The German ambassador informs the Foreign Office confidentially that Germany's final determination not to interfere has been communicated to the Dutch Government, for transmission to President Kruger.[2] So far so good. But this was not yet the "public advertisement".

When Baron Eckardstein returned from Berlin he suggested an interview on wider matters than Samoa.

[1] Eckardstein's *Erinnerungen*, vol. ii. pp. 33-34.

[2] Note sent over from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, August 18, 1899. Chamberlain annotated: "Very nice reading. J. C."

ECKARDSTEIN TO CHAMBERLAIN

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North Berwick, September 12.—I was very sorry not to have an opportunity of seeing you in London on my return from Berlin, as there are two points, which are still in the way of permanent good relations between England and Germany and ought to be discussed and settled as soon as possible before they become acute again.

The German Government know that you are in favour of good relations between the two countries, and I am convinced that after half an hour's talk we shall come to an understanding about those points and prepare the ground for an official understanding. . . .

I would be greatly obliged if you could give me within the next week or fortnight an appointment only for half an hour when and wherever it suits you.

. . . All the sensible politicians in Germany as well as the capitalists look upon an absorbation of the Transvaal by England as an historical and commercial necessity. . . .

Before the meeting requested by the German envoy could take place a significant exchange of letters passed between the Prime Minister and the Colonial Minister. They throw strong light upon the complications of British policy three weeks before the South African conflict. The German ambassador in London had been instructed to make it clear that the Kaiser's visit to England could not be expected unless the Samoan question were settled forthwith. The British ambassador in Berlin was informed at the same time that further delay would open the prospect of eventualities much for the worse in the relations of the two countries.

SALISBURY AND CHAMBERLAIN

September 18, 1899.—*S. to J. C.* (enclosing a letter from Hatzfeldt).—A perusal of the enclosed may perhaps lead you to the impression that Samoa and the Transvaal are not wholly disconnected at least in the mind of the German Emperor. . . . I feel little doubt that the threat has been put forward with the intention that it should reach my ears. . . . I do not see any way "out" quite clearly, and am doubtful what to recommend. . . .

September 18, 1899.—*J. C. to S.*—The policy of the German Empire since Bismarck has been always one of undisguised blackmail. I expected

that they would press Samoa at the present juncture. Baron Eckardstein, who seems to be employed by the Emperor behind Hatzfeldt's back, has been seeking an interview with me. I put him off last time I was in London, but I believe he is coming to see me on Wednesday.

I take it that my duty as Colonial Secretary is to represent the case of the colonials and to warn my colleagues of any bad effect that their action may have on colonial feeling.

But I have also to consider the general policy of the Government, and I cannot doubt that at the present time the Transvaal question is of much greater importance than any other. My conviction is that before the first half of the twentieth century is past, Germany and France will find themselves ousted from any possessions they may have in the Pacific by the forces of Australasia—whether they will then be Colonial forces I do not know.

If, therefore, you think it necessary or desirable to pay the price for the Emperor's support—or neutrality—I shall make no objection on my own account, and we must face the colonial indignation as best we can.

In any case, I will follow your lead and accept your decision.

Here Chamberlain shows both the coolest statesmanship for the moment and foresighted instinct looking to a future he would not live to see. As he had said a year before, "Well it is worth while to pay blackmail sometimes". If then, much more now when war or peace with the Boers is the imminent issue. Consenting at last to a British evacuation of the Samoa group, Chamberlain will deal as best he may with the anger of Australia and New Zealand. But some day "the forces of Australasia" will square the reckoning in the South Seas.

VII

Two days later Eckardstein called at the Colonial Office and it looked as though the deadlock were about to loosen.

The conversation indeed begins not too smoothly. Chamberlain admits for the first time that war in South Africa is unavoidable: the Transvaal's attitude makes a peaceful solution impossible.[1] Eckardstein says in effect that for German neutrality

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 395 (Hatzfeldt to Wilhelmstrasse, September 20).

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all depends on satisfactory settlement of the Samoan dispute. Unless Britain is more yielding the Kaiser's Government for all its wish to be friendly will be driven into antagonism by the wrath of German public opinion. Does England realise the consequences? Chamberlain, we are told, was unpleasantly touched. In bitter words he said that Germany was seeking to make capital out of British troubles in South Africa.

Then, perhaps taking up in his swift way a hint brought by Eckardstein from Berlin, he boldly proposes something new—that Britain in view of Australasian feeling shall retain the chief island Upolu and that Germany shall accept rich compensation in the shape of concessions in West Africa which hitherto he has always refused. In asking Germany at this eleventh hour to give up her fixed desire in deference to British colonial sentiment we see that he keeps his nerve.

From this time the wires are warm between London and Berlin. The Wilhelmstrasse seems not disinclined to accept West African compensation if the morsels are very fat. Baron Eckardstein sees the Colonial Secretary frequently and writes as often; sometimes in high feather, sometimes in low spirits:

ECKARDSTEIN TO CHAMBERLAIN

September 30.— . . . Altogether I feel very hopeful that we shall come to terms. . . . Count Hatzfeldt and Lord Salisbury had a long interview this afternoon. . . . They are still playing hide and seek. I wish we could get them soon to business, but Count Hatzfeldt would like that you and I come to an understanding about every detail first. . . .

October 4.—I had bad news to-day which I cannot understand yet at all. According to them it looks as if Germany had dropped any idea of negotiation and that the visit of the Emperor will be indefinitely postponed. . . . I am fearfully worried.

October 5.— . . . My fears which I expressed to you in my letter of last night are without foundation. . . . I hope you will be kind enough to give me an appointment.

The further conversation thus requested was arranged for a date destined to be fateful. It was October 9, when President Kruger was to issue his ultimatum to the British Empire. In

any case war was but a matter of a few days more or less. Something decisive had to be done to end the Anglo-German dispute. Discussion on the old lines was useless. An entirely new and simple basis would have to be found. For the Colonial Secretary the interests of Australia and New Zealand still came first. He proposed that Germany should clear out of Samoa altogether on tempting terms. Next day he has the terms in writing. Though the other demands on his time were desperate the elaborate document is drawn up in his own hand.[1]

In return for quitting the Samoan and Tonga groups Germany was not only to receive extensive compensation in the shape of other Pacific islands—which need not be mentioned here, though their many names recall Captain Cook's and other voyages. She was offered also in West Africa that triangle of territory at the mouth of the Volta river, long-coveted by Germany but which Chamberlain—like Liverpool and Manchester—hated to part with; and further, a slice of the "neutral zone" behind their Togoland and our Gold Coast, the rest going to Britain. He commented:—

> Note that almost all the concessions asked from England are concessions of territories which are actually in British possession. Concession by Germany is only of her share of joint rights in neutral territories.
>
> Also that the Volta triangle is in regard of trade worth as much or more than the whole colony of Togoland, while the neutral zone is a white elephant costing much to maintain.
>
> The proposals above must be treated as being at present only the ideas of a possible settlement which have recommended themselves to Baron von Eckardstein and Mr. Chamberlain. They do not in any way commit either Government to their approval.—J. C. 10/10.

But he stipulates severely in a second document (Plan II.) that if Germany insists upon having our share of Samoa, then she must cede her part of the Solomon Islands, her claims in the Tonga group, and must not expect an inch of the Volta triangle.

Perhaps no single episode under the Unionist regime better

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 656-660 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, October 9 and 10), and also Eckardstein, vol. ii. pp. 37-38.

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shows Chamberlain's real position as an equal power, at least, in a Dual Government. Here, if not Prime Minister, he was playing the part—and it was necessary—of directing Minister.

VIII

For Berlin the choice between sense and sentiment was poignant. On the terms, to leave Samoa was by far the better bargain for commercial Germany. But against cold reason was every force of feeling.

Eckardstein illuminates the German situation in the first days of the South African war. He was summoned to Berlin. It proved a useless mission. His account is that the Colonial section of the Wilhelmstrasse were in favour of Chamberlain's wish; that Holstein emphatically approved it; that Bülow personally inclined to it. In vain. Still the Kaiser's imagination was fixed on Samoa. His pride was staked on it. With "tears of blood" Tirpitz, as a sailor, protested. As for German opinion in general Eckardstein remarks with sprightly bitterness that it knew not "whether Samoa was the name of fish, fowl or girl" but the more loudly declared "that this thing was German and for all time German must remain".[1]

The Kaiser's naval enthusiasts plied the Wilhelmstrasse with such arguments as were to prevail more and more up to the World War. Samoa, they swear, has become of greater importance as a naval station. In the future it will be of far higher importance still when the Panama Canal is opened and creates new strategical routes.[2] Further, the advantages for a German world-cable of the future are claimed to be extraordinary—"although the chief of the Imperial postal service explained that Samoa was out of consideration as a cable-station".[3] Eckardstein describes an interview when he was not allowed to open his mouth, while Admiral Tirpitz trumpeted that German policy in the future must take more energetic measures towards England and America, and explained the "egg-dance" that German diplomacy will have to perform until the naval pro-

[1] Eckardstein, vol. ii. p. 41.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 660-661 (Tirpitz to Bülow, October 11).

[3] Erich Brandenburg, *Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege*, p. 110.

gramme is complete.[1] The Kaiser reiterated that nothing would induce him to set foot in England unless in advance the Samoan question were squared as he wished.

IX

Eckardstein returned on a distasteful errand. The Colonial Secretary received him coolly, and faced the new situation with prompt realism. His "Plan I.", for all his pains, would have to go. His "Plan II." and British retreat from Samoa was the alternative. Nothing but the exigencies of the war could have induced him to accept it. He had fought his best for Australia and New Zealand, and would have to telegraph for their consent to the new terms. And if Germany must have Samoa, she must as he had stipulated pay for it to the full.

On another point in this hard colloquy with Eckardstein, Hatzfeldt remarks that Chamberlain is "a man of his word". Notably he was. But also he left no doubt on this occasion that whatever Britain's difficulties might be, war or no war, he was a man of his last word.[2] Bülow haggles for yet a little more. Chamberlain repeats that they get no more from him. Eckardstein, whom otherwise he will be happy to see, must not come to him with any new demands.[3]

At this the German ambassador by telegram is instructed to offer the Colonial Secretary's own terms to the Prime Minister on condition that acceptance is announced before the Kaiser's visit. In the Cabinet Council of November 1 Chamberlain's settlement was adopted without modification.[4]

There was an epilogue partly entertaining, partly painful. The Prime Minister had received gross provocation from William II. He repaid it with obdurate dexterity. For weeks he had surpassed himself in the dialectic and tactic of delay.[5] When the Kaiser was on tenterhooks Lord Salisbury kept him there. The

[1] Eckardstein, *Erinnerungen*, vol. ii. p. 40.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xiv. Second Part, pp. 664-666 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, October 20).

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 668-670 (Conversation with Eckardstein reported by Hatzfeldt to Wilhelmstrasse, October 26).

[4] *Ibid.* p. 675 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, November 1, 1899).

[5] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 121-123, where Salisbury's dispatch to Lascelles is a masterpiece in the art of stating objections with almost paralysing exhaustiveness.

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more the German diplomats summoned him to conduct affairs "with his watch in his hand", as he once put it with all his sardonic felicity, the more he made them wait.

To the concern of his own colleagues as well as to the distraction of the German Embassy, he was disposed to ensure meticulous correctness in ways that would have postponed the actual signature. Poor Hatzfeldt, ill, and dreading alike his Emperor's wrath and the Prime Minister's retaliation, is thrown into a feverish nightmare. He entreats Eckardstein to represent to Chamberlain and Balfour, and perhaps the Duke of Devonshire, that the Kaiser's visit may yet be jeopardised by postponing formal completion of the agreement. Above all, urge on Chamberlain that the German Government looks to him to prevent the watering of the wine.[1]

In response to these agitated entreaties the Duke of Devonshire writes to the Colonial Secretary trusting that "Salisbury knows what he is about", but fearing that the Imperial visit may fall through.[2] Chamberlain had been in an irksome position. Between him and the Prime Minister there had been a direct contest, however guarded in form, and he had won. But he had not welcomed the necessity, and more silent friction with Salisbury was the last thing he desired. His reply was calming to a duke seldom indeed perturbed:

CHAMBERLAIN TO THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE

November 5. . . . It is unfortunate that Salisbury and Hatzfeldt do not get on together, and I fancy that the former does not quite like Eckardstein's (and perhaps my) intrusion into Foreign Office business. I have warned Eckardstein that he must leave the final stages in the hands of Salisbury and Hatzfeldt, and that only harm will come of any further intervention on our part. . . .

The only fault I find with Eckardstein is that he tries to frighten me—and does frighten Alfred Rothschild—with blood-curdling reports of Russian and French intrigues.

William II. treated our military attache in Berlin to a pic-

[1] Eckardstein, *Erinnerungen*, vol. ii. p. 75 (November 2).

[2] Duke of Devonshire to Chamberlain, November 4, 1899.

turesque tirade upon the subject of our "two-headed Government":

> Your Government in England appears to have two heads, Lord Salisbury and Mr. Chamberlain, and the one will not do what the other wants. With Mr. Chamberlain the negotiations proceed smoothly and quickly, and an agreement could be come to with him very rapidly, but what he agrees to Lord Salisbury refuses to sanction, and so the affair is dragged out for months and months.... I am not the King of Portugal, and this treatment of the subject is evidence of very bad diplomatic manners.... I desire to remain friendly to England but I have my duties as German Emperor to think of, and I cannot go on sitting on the safety-valve for ever.[1]

Two days after this not inexcusable outburst, the news that an agreement was assured, and the gist of its contents, were published simultaneously in London and Berlin. German congratulations showered upon Bülow. Possessed of Upolu and Savaii, and regarding them as amongst the bright jewels of his crown, William II. telegraphed to his Minister:

> Bravo! Am most pleased and delighted. You are a real magician, granted to me quite undeservedly by Heaven in its goodness.[2]

He ignored Chamberlain's repeated warnings, that Australia and New Zealand, one day, would have to be reckoned with in the South Seas.

Meanwhile the Colonial Secretary was equally satisfied. Germany had put sentiment before sense and left Britain with the best of the bargain. The Volta triangle remained ours to the especial relief of Manchester and Liverpool, while the "Neutral Zone" in the hinterland was fairly partitioned. Thus in West Africa there was nothing but gain. In the South Seas the account was level. As regards harbours and trade, the experts of the Colonial Office assured their Chief that the many islands ceded by Germany in the Tonga and Solomon groups were more than an equivalent for Samoa.

In the name of the German Government Eckardstein addressed the Colonial Secretary in words of unwonted warmth:

[1] *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 129-130 (Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Grierson to Viscount Gough, November 6, 1898).

[2] Bülow's *Memoirs* (English translation), p. 281.

ECKARDSTEIN TO CHAMBERLAIN

BOOK XIII. 1899.

November 9.—Count Bülow and Count Hatzfeldt desire me to write to you and thank you in their name for your kind attitude and great help in bringing about an arrangement between England and Germany which does not only solve the Samoan question but abolishes every colonial antagonism between the two countries.

They are both fully alive to the fact that without your intervention this settlement would have been utterly impossible, and they are extremely grateful to you. . . .

Count Bülow who is coming to England with The Kaiser on the 20th inst. hopes that he will have the pleasure of making your acquaintance in order to thank you in person for the great help you have afforded to him and his policy. . . .

For many years no such cordial letter had been officially addressed to a British statesman in the name of Germany, nor was the like to be known again.

X

Chamberlain in answer hopes that the agreement will do much "to unite our two countries in closer bonds of friendship" and looks forward to making Count Bülow's acquaintance.

Eckardstein's inward sincerity at this time in his intercourse with Chamberlain seems above doubt, though he could not confess all the moral complications of his task. Looking back, in the dark days long afterwards, he adds memories and reflections. He tells how their familiar idea of an Anglo-German alliance was discussed often in the abstract, but how at strained moments of this long debate Chamberlain repeatedly threatened to break off—with the warning that he would face the price of a thorough settlement with France and Russia should satisfactory dealings with Germany prove impossible. Informed of this, Holstein met it with his wonted stylistic derision and held to his fixed dogma that conflict between Britain and one or both of the Powers of the Dual Alliance was unescapable; and that the choice of alternatives lay in Germany's hands not ours.[1]

Yet the Samoan agreement, for a while, seemed to clear the

[1] Eckardstein, *Erinnerungen*, vol. ii. pp. 99-106.

way for better things. Unchanged in his conviction that the risks of British isolation would have to be removed by one means or the opposite, Chamberlain still with all his heart preferred alliance with Germany. Almost at once there would be a second chance for it. Later, again on his initiative, there would be a third and no other.

Now, the Kaiser's secured visit to Windsor was the "public advertisement" of German neutrality—nearly four years after the Jameson Raid and the Kruger telegram. Half of that period we traversed in former chapters, not without recurrent expectation of a peaceful issue in South Africa. We must now see what has happened in that quarter since Milner went out just before Her Majesty's Greater Jubilee. Shortly, came the counterstrokes of fortune at Kiao-Chau and Port Arthur, on the Lower Niger and on the Upper Nile. For a time these had seemed an unprecedented concert of perils to the modern Empire chiefly animated then by Joseph Chamberlain. Two of the perils had failed. They were to fail every one. But to most even of the well-wishing part of the world, no less than to the Transvaal burghers and Germany, to France and the Tsardom, that sequel of escape did not seem probable at the moment we have reached.

BOOK XIV

1897–1899

CHAPTER LXIII

CHAMBERLAIN AND MILNER—TWO PHASES, AND THE NEXT?

(1897–1899)

EIGHTEEN Months of South Africa—Colonial Secretary and High Commissioner—Character and Circumstance—A War-cloud Passes—Chamberlain and "Suzerainty"—The Truth Shown—Milner's First "Phase of Hope"—"Transvaal Reform from Within"—Kruger Crushes his Opponents—Milner's Revulsion and Drastic Proposals—Chamberlain's Imperative "No"—Distance and Misunderstanding—Milner's Second Phase: "Marking Time"—His Deepening Conviction: "Reform or War"—He Comes Home to Consult Chamberlain.

I

WHEN Milner sailed out in the spring of 1897 he was one man not fully known to himself or others. When he next returned to England in the late autumn of 1898, for momentous consultation with Chamberlain, he was a far different man. Through the eighteen months between—condensed here into a single chapter—the inner history of the South African question through fluctuations of hope and alarm is told with unusual intimacy in the correspondence between the Colonial Secretary at home and the High Commissioner at the Cape.[1] It throws penetrant light not only on motives and consequences in South Africa but on the springs of government at home; and on the contrasting positions and characters of two collaborators, chief and lieutenant, working many thousands of miles apart.

That Milner did most of the writing hardly needs to be said. The Colonial Secretary by now could not send full answers except at longer intervals. Cabinet Minister, co-leader in what

[1] *Milner Papers, South Africa*, vol. i., 1897–1899.

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the Kaiser called our "Two-headed Government"; foremost as a parliamentarian in all emergencies while the most active and dominating of national leaders on the platform; watching the constituencies; keeping up his services to his own City—Chamberlain in addition had on his hands the administration of nearly all the overseas empire except India. He received private letters from over a score of Governors, major and minor. It was impossible that he could write to any of them nearly as often as each of them wrote to him. Milner had more fecundity and colour in expression than all the rest together. Apart from his dispatches proper he wrote confidentially and at length to the Colonial Minister every few weeks.

When this potent association began, neither suspecting what it would mean, Chamberlain was not much over sixty, the younger man about three-and-forty. The Secretary of State, still suggesting perpetual freshness, was in disposition the more sanguine of the pair. Milner, for all his courteous charm in friendly intercourse, was of a profoundly meditative nature, and of a cast of mind innately grave with regard to public things. In intellectual energy, moral courage, sustained fervour, he might compare with any man. His temperament was not quick tinder in the aggressive sense, but his intimates knew that his spirit in resistance could be of an intense and enduring flame. In face of difficulties and dangers he worked out coherent systems of thought and action. Then they were fixed, as well as methodic conceptions.

Chamberlain's habit—if we may revert to-day to the old jargon which had its uses—was more objective and less subjective. His life of action, direction and risk from a very early age had compelled him to school his wishes and to consider his methods with a detached eye. The parliamentary statesman was more flexible in devices and alternatives, less set in mood until the moment of final resolve, incomparably alert and shrewd in managing public opinion at home. And we must recollect again and always that the Colonial Secretary during the whole of the eighteen months covered by this chapter had to grapple as we saw with a host of the most various concerns. On the question of South Africa, Milner's whole attention, faculty and force were absorbed without swerving.

Through nearly six years of political inseparability, as it proved, they were nearly always six thousand miles apart. That long period was to try them both to the core. Under the conditions, some disagreements and misunderstandings were inevitable. Not only so. More than once strain threatened a breach. But however opposite in many characteristics, they were men so capable of rational adjustment, so bound together by the main considerations, so staunch in the fibre of personal loyalty, that, overcoming every difficulty created between them by distance and crisis, they stood by each other to the end.

II

The gravity of the circumstances when the High Commissioner went out has been explained in an earlier chapter. On his voyage he remarked: "One thing is certain, the worst is immediately before me. If we can pull through the next year without disaster, I believe the situation may be saved." [1]

When he landed at Cape Town on May 5, 1897, the question of war or peace still hung in the balance; the instant thing he had to consider was the anxiety of his military advisers. Later, he described his first feelings—"When I arrived here everything looked desperately bad, and we were within an ace of a blow-up".[2] Immediately afterwards the Transvaal gave way. The Raad dourly repealed the offending Aliens Immigration Act. Tension gradually relaxed. The new-comer could report to his chief that it was "an immense relief, as it gives me time to turn round".

He believed that British firmness had aided essentially to bring about the better spirit and must be maintained. None the less, with a fulness of goodwill, he entered upon his phase of hope.

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

Capetown, May 11, 1897.—It is impossible to tell you in what a state of "nerves" I find everybody in the Colony, and I believe it is the same throughout South Africa. You may try as hard as you please to talk of other subjects—the only thing which interests everybody is the question

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 42.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 53.

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of Peace or War. Everybody recoils with real abhorrence from the latter alternative, but while some think to avert it by "conciliation", others, with more wisdom as I think, believe that a firm policy on the part of the Imperial Government is the likeliest means of maintaining peace. . . .

Personally, I feel it is an immense relief, as it gives me time to turn round and to impress upon people what is the real spirit and object of British policy, which is still widely misunderstood. It will seem incredible to you, after all that has been said, but the mass of the Dutch do still firmly believe that we mean to "jump" the Transvaal. If it could only be got into their heads that, while we mean to be masters and to exclude foreign interference, we have not the least wish to take away their local independence, the game, certainly as far as the Cape Colony is concerned, would be won. But the mischief is, they doubt our good faith—no wonder perhaps with the Raid still so fresh in their memories and *being kept fresh*—and it will be a slow business to win their confidence, the more so as it is absolutely essential not to estrange the English, who on their side are frightfully sore and irritated, though the fleet, the reinforcements and the quasi-retreat of the Transvaal have somewhat comforted them. . . .[1]

August 2. [Replying to the letter below from the Colonial Secretary]— . . . There are heavy clouds still on the horizon, but nothing like the imminent storm I found when I came here. . . . We have put our foot down, and we must keep it there. The internal state of the Transvaal is the danger of S. Africa. That country is in a terrible mess, social, political and financial. I think great allowance must be made for the men who have to govern a country in that state, even if their methods often seem to us very unwise. We should be very patient with them, very conciliatory, remembering how much excuse they have for regarding us with suspicion. But we cannot afford to appear, or to be, weak. It is no use being conciliatory if people think you are only conciliatory because you are afraid. . . . And from war with England I believe even the most violent of the reactionaries will shrink, as they have shrunk already, if such a contingency stares them in the face. . . .[2]

It was some time before the Colonial Secretary, amidst the exhausting demands of the Jubilee season, could unbosom himself. The first of his few full-length letters to the High Com-

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 72-73.

missioner is worth weighing. He is scrupulously reasonable: all for a policy of patience. His old distrust of the influence of Rhodes comes out again. "In any case the British Government cannot take their policy from him." Now that the crisis provoked by a breach of the Convention has been met and overcome, Chamberlain does not dream of forcing any issue. He would be satisfied for the present if President Kruger granted to the Uitlanders the most moderate of concessions in the shape of municipal and educational reform.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

Colonial Office, July 5.— . . . You will understand that I have been overwhelmed with work, and I beg you to take for granted that I am always glad to receive letters from you though it may not always be possible for me to acknowledge them. . . .

I wish it were possible to persuade President Kruger to give us something in the way of moderate reforms for the Uitlanders. Personally, I should be satisfied with a municipality for Johannesburg on the English pattern and a liberal administration of the Education Laws. Neither change would injure him in the least or affect the independence and security of the Republic, but it would have a considerable political effect here. . . .

I am a little alarmed at your account of Rhodes' plans and position. He certainly does not come out well in connection with the South African Enquiry, and it would be most desirable that he should lie low for a time. In any case the British Government cannot take their policy from him, and public opinion here will undoubtedly require considerable changes in the administration of the Chartered Company. . . .

Unfortunately Rhodes cannot unite the English without giving offence and cause of suspicion to the Dutch. We want to convince the latter that, while British supremacy must be maintained, every respect will be shown to local feeling and Dutch sentiment—that our policy is defensive and not aggressive, but that at the same time we will not yield an inch in derogation of our legitimate rights and position. . . .

No Liberal statesman could have written more temperately to the Queen's representative at the Cape. This was Chamberlain's real mind at the beginning of the policy of patience. We shall see how steadfastly he adhered to it—despite Milner's

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own sombre change of opinion—until events in the Transvaal itself launched a political landslide.

III

To free the later narrative from interruption, we must give summary dismissal here to the interminable dispute on "suzerainty". We saw how that controversy began and we followed its course up to Milner's first departure for the Cape.[1] Some popular errors have been dispelled once for all. Particularly a lingering myth—that the Colonial Secretary made a "deadly shibboleth", as Dryden has it, of the term "suzerainty"; that he goaded the Boers with it for two years; and that, in the end, we slew the sons of Ephraim because they could not or would not in his fashion pronounce a pass-word. It has been shown how immediately after the Raid the term "suzerainty", and the question of relative status, however it might be defined, were raised not by Chamberlain but by Kruger himself in his communications first with Berlin and then with London.

At last in May 1897 when Milner had just reached the Cape, Pretoria requested that henceforth in case of disagreement, the London Convention should be interpreted by foreign arbiters.[2] At this, the whole Unionist Government, not Chamberlain only, considered it imperative to reassert the suzerainty. The Lord Chancellor gave it bluntly that the legal relations were those of a "Sovereign Power" to a "subordinate State".[3] By the Transvaal proposal for foreign arbitration the British Government was summoned to meet a challenge to that "substance" of suzerainty, which even Lord Derby, and the Gladstone administration to which by anomaly he belonged, supposed themselves to have efficiently maintained.[4] That administration called the Transvaal a "dependent State". That it was "within the

[1] See Chapter LII. of this volume.

[2] C.8721 of 1898, pp. 6-14 (C. van Boeschoten, Acting State Secretary, Pretoria, to the British Agent, W. Conyngham Greene, May 7, 1897).

[3] Lord Halsbury's memorandum, May 22, 1897 (Chamberlain Papers): "It is clear that the whole scope of the Convention contemplates a real authority on the part of the Sovereign Power in respect of the external relations of the subordinate State".

[4] Lord Derby in the House of Lords: "A certain controlling power is retained when the State which exercises this Suzerainty has a right to veto any negotiations into which the dependent State may enter with foreign powers" (Hansard, House of Lords, Third Series, vol. cclxxxvi. col. 7, March 18, 1884).

British sphere of influence" another Liberal Government, Lord Rosebery's, had asserted as against Germany. That position, we may say, had been declared after the Kruger telegram by the British Empire as a whole.

It was the kind of question that wise statesmanship cannot desire to force. The Transvaal treatise remained unanswered for five months. Then, in the autumn of 1897, on October 16, the Colonial Secretary returned a compact reply. He maintained that the "Preamble" of the first Convention after Majuba had never been revoked; that the later Convention only spoke of substituting new "Articles"; that therefore the original declaration of the Queen's suzerainty remained valid.[1] On both sides the push of concrete forces was behind the war of words.

Thenceforth the correspondence was a donkey-race with the prize for the slowest. Rather no prize could ever be awarded, for the course on these terms never could be completed by either competitor within any conjecturable period of historic time. The five months' silence on the British side is scrupulously exceeded by six months' silence on the Boer side. Then, Dr. Leyds in an immense and adroit disquisition fills twelve pages of blue-book. He repeats the case for foreign arbitration and rejects "suzerainty".[2] Suspended for no less than eight months this time, the Colonial Secretary's reassertion is as concise as Boer ingenuities allow.[3] Pretoria receives this early in January 1899, the beginning of the fatal year. Four months more of that year elapse. Then Reitz, State Secretary of the Transvaal, maintains "the inherent right of this Republic" to regard itself as "a sovereign international State"—still prepared, however, to observe the limiting Convention.[4] After two years of word-spinning and hair-splitting, further argument could revolve only in a vicious circle. Chamberlain's brief answer through the High Commissioner in July 1899, closed the correspondence. "Her Majesty's Government . . . have no intention of continuing to discuss this question with the Government of the Republic, whose contention that the South African Republic is a sovereign

[1] C.8721 of 1898, No. 7 (Chamberlain to Milner, October 16, 1897).

[2] C.9507 of 1899, enclosure in No. 4 (Leyds to the British Agent, Pretoria, April 16, 1898).

[3] *Ibid.* No. 6 (Chamberlain to Acting High Commissioner, Sir W. F. Butler, December 15, 1898).

[4] *Ibid.*, enclosure in No. 7 (F. W. Reitz, State Secretary, Pretoria, to High Commissioner, Cape Town, May 9, 1899).

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international State is not, in their opinion, warranted either by law or history, and is wholly inadmissible."[1]

And shortly afterwards, these channels of controversy were lost like brooks in a flood.

To Chamberlain the name was naught; the substance everything; and to be defended at all costs.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER ON "SUZERAINTY"

March 16, 1898.— . . . As regards the Suzerainty question, it is quite possible that they may reject our interpretation, but of this I am disposed to take scant notice. As long as they do not infringe the articles of the Convention of 1884, the interpretation of the Preamble of 1881 is really an academic question. . . .

June 3, 1898.— . . . The lengthy despatch from Leyds has not made much sensation here, and it is not my intention to treat it at any length or very seriously. The Suzerainty, I believe, exists, and I know of no other word which represents the peculiar position the Transvaal holds to us under the Convention. Providing, however, that the latter is strictly observed, it does not matter to me what name the Transvaal give to their subordination on these points. . . .

According to the jurists, "suzerainty", it seems, may mean anything or nothing. Upon the specific instrument invoked depends degree of meaning. Control of foreign relations implies a pronounced degree of predominance. Lord Salisbury's Government thought the traditional term more suitable than "supremacy", "sovereignty", "paramountcy", "superiority", "hegemony". That Chamberlain's treatment of this curious matter arose from any personal kink or perversity can only be imagined by those little acquainted with the advisory processes of government departments or with the working of the Cabinet system. By the initiative and repetition of the Transvaal Government "suzerainty" was expressly denied. Its reassertion by Britain was a Cabinet policy in the strictest sense, founded on the opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown. Chamberlain and Kruger were concerned with a conflict of meanings not to be aggravated nor mitigated by nicety in verbiage.

This was no mediaeval disputation about quiddity and entity.

[1] C.9507 of 1899, No. 8 (Chamberlain to Milner, July 13, 1899).

The solid question was whether Britain should renounce not only supremacy in South Africa but equality, even safety; and whether a Boer dominance in fact was to be built up without hindrance in the north by the revenues extracted from the unenfranchised Uitlanders.

It is proper to add that on the very eve of the outbreak of war, the then leader of the Liberal Opposition, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman himself—to Harcourt's and Morley's distress it is true—emphasised "paramountcy".[1] Euphemism in no wise soothing to the clenched veteran in Pretoria whose life's longing was "independence".

IV

We must revert to the relations between Colonial Secretary and High Commissioner. The phase of hope, unfortunately, was an evanescent episode in history, and plays but a momentary part in these pages. It is none the less important to understand why it flowered and why it faded.

Milner addresses himself to his task like the almost ideal man —with a master mind, devoted application and physical activity. He will see for himself and spare no pains; and learns Dutch so as to read the Afrikander and Boer newspapers. Moreover, he sets himself to pick up the "taal" that he may talk with the folk in their dorps and on their farms.

In a few months he was ready, with the Colonial Secretary's high approval, to undertake the first of his long tours in the Colony. He visited parts of it which no former Governor had seen. November found him in Rhodesia. His presence signalised what was no small thing—the opening of the railway to Buluwayo. But he estimated in a very long letter to Chamberlain that Rhodesian development was likely to be slow—"my guess is that it is neither going to be a fiasco nor yet a rapid success".[2] Already he had dissuaded Chamberlain from appointing an independent Governor for Rhodesia and withdrawing it from his own authority as High Commissioner. Warnings never were far from his mind even in the phase of hope:

[1] Speech at Maidstone, October 6, 1899. Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 503.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 139-146 (December 1, 1897).

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> As far as I can see ahead, the post of High Commissioner will be a *fighting post*. It would be a great mistake to suppose that because S. African politics have fortunately entered upon a calmer phase, the everlasting struggle is not going on below the surface. *I am fighting all the time. . . .*[1]

The High Commissioner's guarded optimism in these early months was little connected with his Hadrian-like journeys. It was otherwise founded. As evident was it to Milner from his arrival, as to Chamberlain long before, that without reform of the Transvaal system there could be no health in the body politic of South Africa. Sir Henry de Villiers—and no man spoke with better judgment—had told the Colonial Secretary that no cure was to be looked for while Kruger lived. But was not a younger generation stirring? Kruger was aged. Inveterate despot as he was by faith in his mission even more than by nature and long prerogative, there were some new signs around him which might well be mistaken for symptoms of enlightened revolt. Expectation of Transvaal reform from within was the basis of Milner's earlier reckoning.

As on a familiar occasion there were judges in Berlin, so it seemed now in Pretoria. Chief Justice Kotze had ruled in the High Court that in the South African Republic, as in the United States of America, the principles of the Constitution could not be overruled at will either by the executive or the legislature. To Kruger this was no canon of jurisprudence, but the crime of contumacy. Determined were he and the Raad that their power to lay down law should not be fettered by the High Court. This issue, opened before Milner landed, and not settled for months afterwards, was of a kind to move deeply Milner's type of schooled intellect. His sympathy with Kotze was both just and fervent.

> . . . I am watching with the deepest interest the slow growth of opposition to the ruling oligarchy among the Boers themselves. Kotze means to fight. He is not a strong man and the increasing stiffness of his attitude convinces me that he feels sounder ground under his feet than he did at the outset.[2]

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 119 (Milner to Chamberlain, October 5, 1897).

[2] Milner to Chamberlain, August 29, 1897.

The conjecture was that, if the Chief Justice did not win, he would promote a rising spirit of progressive opposition amongst the burghers and would ply a lever in disintegrating the old Krugerite system.

For the same purposes Milner relied still more upon another factor. The Rand, like no other great industrial district on earth, was hampered and hindered by burthens and exactions; especially by the dynamite monopoly and oppressive railway rates. A prime necessity for the working of the mines were explosives. By the scandal of monopoly, costs were grossly increased, enriching privileged individuals. Kruger was induced to appoint an Industrial Commission of Enquiry. At first the Rand expected little or nothing from it, but was presently awakened by the ability of the investigation and the strength of the findings. The chairman was Schalk Burger, momentarily expected by some to become the "Old Man's" rival. Just two months after Milner's appearance in South Africa, the drastic report by the President's own Commission amounted to what is called a damning indictment.[1] The High Commissioner rejoiced no less than Johannesburg:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

August 29, 1897.— . . . Schalk Burger, the President of the Mining Commission, an out-and-out Boer, is not going to let the conclusions of that Commission be treated with contempt by the Executive. Unless Leyds succeeds in stifling all this nascent opposition by trotting out the old bugbear of "our independence in danger", we shall surely see a strongish opposition spring up which will be bound to lean, timidly at first, but with more and more openness as the fight thickens, upon Uitlander support.

They will angle for it in the first instance by concessions to the Mining Industry, but sooner or later they must come to a gradual extension of the franchise, which some of them would propose to-morrow if they dared, because they will need *some* Uitlander votes to turn the scale in their own favour against the men in power. . . .[2]

With sympathy we perceive what were the springs of the High Commissioner's conditional optimism while new to his work. He

[1] Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within* (edition of 1899), pp. 302-311.
[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 89.

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counted upon a double revolt against the old Boer system. Both on the legal and the economic side, glimmerings looked very like the coming of daylight. Should Kotze and Schalk Burger but stick to their guns, then more and more they would shake Kruger's obscurantist dictatorship and gradually emancipate the Uitlanders by reform from within. Towards the end of the year he wrote in this sense very intimately to a rising leader of the Opposition at home, his friend Asquith. "Lastly, as regards the Transvaal, I think very likely the question will solve itself, because the Transvaal oligarchy is bound sooner or later to topple over." [1] Not so many weeks later, very early in the New Year, there was a sudden end of the phase of hope. And an end of the policy of patience on Milner's part, though not on Chamberlain's.

V

The grim "old man" was not to be so soon shaken by Kotze or Schalk Burger, any more than by Rhodes, or by anyone or anything. Irrelevant were differing opinions about whether Kotze or Schalk Burger were of the mettle to stick to their guns; they had no guns to stick to. The President reprobated his Chairman of the Industrial Commission, just like his Chief Justice, for undermining Boer unity. Vain, in face of this man and this appeal, were all reckonings on dissension and disintegration. The Volksraad either nullified, stultified or shelved the mining recommendations. Kotze's legal resistance lost support.

The final fate of these and larger issues depended on the approaching Presidential elections in the South African Republic. Would Oom Paul remain master still? Few could guess how much hung on this contest. The result would tell Milner personally whether his hopes were forces or phantoms. The three candidates in the Republic were President Kruger, General Joubert and Schalk Burger. The first solemnly condemned the third for notions of economic progress which were dangerous to political independence. "Independence"—if ever there was a man of one word it was Oom Paul. The electoral campaign lasted for over two months. The poll—eagerly awaited through-

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 179 (November 18, 1897).

out South Africa—was declared on February 10, 1898. By some who claimed to be judges of local conditions the High Commissioner in Cape Town had been assured that the President's defeat was just conceivable; and that, if he won, his margin would be so narrow as to cripple his former power.

Instead he was re-elected for the fourth time by the most triumphal of all his majorities. To understand it we must compare.[1]

TWO TRANSVAAL ELECTIONS

February 1898	*Votes*	*April* 1893	*Votes*
KRUGER . .	12,858	KRUGER . .	7,854
SCHALK BURGER	3,750	JOUBERT . .	7,009
JOUBERT . .	2,001	KOTZE . .	81

The "Old Man's" absolutism thus confirmed and fortified, he signalised it by cashiering his recalcitrant Chief Justice. Schalk Burger had been exhibited as a weakling. Fallen were both props of Milner's expectations.

The meaning of it was illuminated in Biblical terms when Kruger expounded the punishment of Kotze. An impious vanity and pride must have entered into him on the Bench, when he puffed himself up by American example against the Executive in the name of the Constitution. "If you honourable judges, in your own judgment, set aside a decree of the Volksraad, then you adopt this right of criticism from the Devil." Were Biblical tenets circumscribed by a profane Bench, wicked confusions must follow. Almost as though he had read our own Fuller's words about the heathen, he said they would not be able to "see God for gods". The President indeed put it more strongly with a Dopper simplicity that in another mouth would have been blasphemous. "Moses gave the law, but could not depart from it. . . . Only the upper authority, the Sovereign God alone, could condemn the law; and not the subordinate."[2] Let it now be made known that judges "wanton as a fish in the water" like Kotze would be gravelled the same. So law and Bench alike were absolutely subjected to the Executive and the Volksraad. The

[1] *Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, vol. ii. pp. 239, 297.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 403-404. Speeches delivered at the solemn inauguration of his honour S. J. P. Kruger as State President of the South African Republic, on Thursday, May 12, 1898.

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Uitlanders cried out that their last safeguard against despotism was swept away.

VI

When the Transvaal events in mid-February 1898 broke Milner's hopes and terminated his first stage, the effect on his mind was not so much negative as positive. Disappointment was exceeded by resolute revulsion. In a few days he became a changed man; or rather circumstance brought out the latent man and compelled him, as we have anticipated, to depict his own true portrait. Kotze and law were under Kruger's feet. The recommendations of the Industrial Commission would remain a dead letter. As Sir Henry de Villiers had told Chamberlain, there would be no reform of the old Boer system while the "Old Man" wielded power. Now, possessed of a virtual autocracy for five long years more, the ironside patriarch based himself more stubbornly on the Old Testament and ammunition. By his military expenditure, he could visit on the Uitlanders the fate of Crassus and choke them with their own gold.

Fairly roused, Milner braced every fibre of his powers for combat. This was innately characteristic. Unless it is seen in that light his political psychology cannot be read. It was said of him as a young parliamentary candidate that he could not speak up to his ability until he was "hit in the eye". Once, in conversation with the present writer, he described how he had been stirred in the first Home Rule struggle by a passion of resistance to what he thought the abuse of Gladstone's autocracy. "For the Liberal-Unionist propaganda we slaved ourselves to shreds. We poured out pamphlets and leaflets. When we were all nearly dead, we used to say to each other, 'Never mind; go on; Dagon must be thrown down'."[1]

Almost simultaneously with Kruger's re-election, Milner's information showed that arms and ammunition were pouring into the Transvaal. Since the Jameson Raid the expenditure of the Republic on armaments had averaged about three-quarters of a million sterling a year.[2] The Orange Free State, fully allied to

[1] Present writer's notes, "Whitsuntide, 1921".

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 241-242; and Pratt, *Leading Points in South African History*, p. 222.

its northern neighbour, was furnished in proportion. What of the Dutch in Cape Colony? The more the High Commissioner came to know of country feeling, especially in the northern districts, the more anxious he was. Whatever else human wit might contrive, it could not prevent the self-same racial interactions from pervading South Africa. Yet a precarious British Ministry at the Cape, weakening every day, might be displaced before long—as it was—by a Bond Ministry which assuredly would try more or less to embarrass direct pressure for Transvaal reform.

A moral "Triple Alliance", of the two Republics and Bond Government in Cape Colony, would exist. It would create in South Africa a Dutch paramountcy in fact, whatever might be argued from the London Conventions about Imperial suzerainty in the abstract. Against virtual Dutch preponderance, owing to the anomalous subjection of the Uitlanders on the Rand, Milner was resolved to set the thesis of white equality throughout South Africa.

This High Commissioner had been sent out, with a consensus of acclaim, to bring a fresh judgment to bear upon South African conditions and to use his own eyes and ears. He had used all faculties with commanding ability and with a stainless good faith never yet denied by those who question his vision and management. Within some nine months from his landing at Cape Town, this was the judgment he had reached. With him, to reach such a judgment was to be rooted in it. The gravity of his conviction—the force of his advocacy—were bound to become a matter of capital importance for Her Majesty's Government.

Chamberlain was certain not to accept the High Commissioner's new policy, however urged, unless the facts of a vicious situation became worse.

VII

Milner's mood charged with thunder reverberated suddenly, awakening all men in South Africa and many at home. He could no longer be regarded as either a neophyte or a neutral.

The scene was Graaf Reinet; the time the beginning of March 1898. Historic reasons had made Graaf Reinet a centre of Dutch

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racial feeling. There, just over a decade and a half before, the Afrikander Bond had been constituted. When the High Commissioner arrived, to open a railway, the local branch of the Bond presented him with a protest against charges of disloyalty. They could not guess that Milner's inmost heart was already volcanic on that subject. He erupted, and made the speech of his life. Loyal?

> What reason could there be for disloyalty? . . . You have—at least as regards the white races, perfect equality of citizenship . . . freely and gladly bestowed upon you because freedom and self-government, justice and equality, are the first principles of British policy. . . . Well, gentlemen, of course you are loyal. It would be monstrous if you were not. . . . The political controversies of this country at present unfortunately turn largely on another question—I mean the relations of Her Majesty's Government to the South African Republic; and that whenever there is any prospect of any difference between them, a number of the people in the Colony at once vehemently, and without even the semblance of impartiality, espouse the side of the Republic. . . .

Admitting that advice tendered by the British in Cape Colony might be rejected in the Transvaal, he contended that the Cape Dutch were in a different position. Their goodwill would not be questioned in the Transvaal. Therefore:

> Let them use all their influence, which is bound to be great, not in confirming the Transvaal in unjustified suspicions, not in encouraging its Government in obstinate resistance to all reform, but in inducing it gradually to assimilate its institutions, and, what is even more important than institutions, the temper and spirit of its administration, to those of the free communities of South Africa, such as this Colony or the Orange Free State. That is the direction in which a peaceful way out of these inveterate troubles which have now plagued this country for more than thirty years is to be found.[1]

This speech altered South Africa like no other single utterance in its annals. The words were impassioned; the analysis true. The practical effect was another matter. The indictment and appeal breathing new life into the British repelled the Dutch. Their keen-witted ally, Merriman, wrote hard truths to President

[1] For the whole speech see *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 244-246.

Steyn of the Orange Free State: "The greatest danger to the future lies in the attitude of President Kruger. . . . Such a state of affairs cannot last. It must break down from inherent rottenness, and it will be well if the fall does not sweep away the freedom of all of us."[1] But this was said in secret. No Afrikander warning to Pretoria was given openly. That was just ground for reproach on the High Commissioner's part. But the Queen's representative had become a great party leader of the British race against the Dutch. What had happened was the very last thing anticipated when Milner's appointment united the suffrages, because he was assumed to be a safe man with a cross-bench mind.

VIII

Thoughts in Government House, Cape Town, and thoughts in Downing Street were as yet incommensurable. Chamberlain and the Cabinet in the weeks after the Graaf Reinet speech were beset by the crisis with Russia in the Far East; by the crisis with France on the lower Niger; by difficult dealings with Germany. British isolation seemed vulnerable on all sides. Far were Ministers at home from being able to think mainly of South Africa, which engrossed their High Commissioner's duty. At that moment it was the last question they wished to force or press. Milner, on the other hand, though not yet quite aware of the range of Imperial embarrassments, knew that in South Africa, as elsewhere, they were diminishing in the eyes of the Dutch the repute of Britain as a Great Power.

For the Colonial Office, Selborne had remarked recently to Cape Town: "The South African piece is, however, off the boards here just at present".[2] In Kruger's re-election and Kotze's case Chamberlain saw no reason to change his principle of "going slow" in active policy, despite his keen dispatches at long intervals. Impossible was it for him to realise the complete change in his lieutenant's mind, until he was startled and jarred to receive from Milner a letter far more alarming than newspaper reports of the Graaf Reinet speech had foreshadowed. For what

[1] Merriman to Steyn, March 11, 1898. (From Correspondence found at Bloemfontein in 1900. Chamberlain's copy.)

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 123 (November 11, 1897).

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does Milner state with all his force of thinking and writing? This —that the issue in the Transvaal is "reform or war"; with the chances all against reform; and that the best policy, on the whole, if his views are approved, will be to "work up to a crisis". Though fully quoted already in the *Milner Papers*,[1] it was an appeal to the Colonial Minister; its effect depended upon his verdict, and passages from it are indispensable here.

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

February 23, 1898.—The long despatch which goes to you by this mail about our differences with the Transvaal, is written with a purpose. I am afraid that after a few months respite we are once more on the verge of serious trouble with the Boers. The despatch is one, which, if things get worse, it may be useful some day to publish. But, of course, *only if things get worse*. My reason in writing this letter is to warn you privately that I think there is very great probability that they may.

There is no ultimate way out of the political troubles of South Africa except reform in the Transvaal or war. And at present the chances of reform in the Transvaal are worse than ever. . . . Kruger has returned to power more autocratic and more reactionary than ever. It would not be surprising if he suffered from megalomania, seeing what he started from and where he now is. He has immense resources in money, and any amount of munitions of war, to which he is constantly adding. Politically he has strengthened his hold on the Orange Free State, and the Colonial Afrikanders continue to do obeisance before him. And not only the Afrikanders. He has been congratulated on his re-election by the unanimous vote of the Bond. And what is more eye-opening, he has also received a congratulatory telegram from Binns, the British Prime Minister of Natal.

. . . Of one thing I am quite certain. Kruger will never take any step which he thinks will provoke us to fight. But if he is assured that our hands are full in other directions, he will certainly seize the opportunity to assert his independence in a very pointed way. . . .

Looking at the question from a purely South African point of view, I should be inclined to work up to a crisis, not indeed by looking about for causes of complaint, or making a fuss about trifles, but by steadily and inflexibly pressing for the redress of substantial wrongs and in-

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 220-224. The above, however, is quoted from the original letter.

justices. It would not be difficult thus to work up an extremely strong *cumulative case*. . . . But if we are going to remonstrate incisively, to insist on being answered promptly and unevasively—in short to show that we mean business—then we cannot disregard either a persistent silence or a flat refusal. It means that we shall have to fight, and to fight *more or less* at a moment chosen by the other side, who very likely may not realise what they are doing. The question, which line to take, cannot therefore be settled exclusively with reference to South Africa. *It depends on the Imperial outlook as a whole.* It is that which must determine, whether we are to be passive here . . .; or whether we are to pursue an active policy, never aggressive indeed, but vigilant and insistent on all our rights, not only treaty rights but the inherent right of every nation to protect its subjects against injury by foreigners. The latter policy may, *and probably will,* require a much larger army, and will require it at a time which can only be approximately foreseen. . . .

The Boers are not going to observe their obligations under the Convention unless they are forced to. If we remonstrate they will say that they interpret them differently, and, as we decline to go to arbitration about the meaning, they propose to adhere to their own interpretation. As, therefore, it will be necessary to take a strong line with them, if we determine even to make the Conventions respected, I see less objection to taking up, in addition, strong popular points not falling under the Conventions, such as the independence of the Bench and the expulsion of aliens on frivolous pretexts. If, on the other hand, the more passive policy appears, *for the present,* the right one, then, of course, there is no use embarrassing ourselves by taking up anything which we are not actually driven to.

Seldom has any Government, with a mass of trouble already on its hands, received more disturbing opinions from a pro-consul in the remote provinces. This, in a sense, was no proper question for Chamberlain alone. It was a Cabinet matter, or at least a matter for the inner Cabinet. The Premier, by medical orders, was absent. The Ministers to whom the letter was circulated were Balfour, "the Duke", the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary for War. But without waiting for their comments, knowing the mind of the whole Government, Chamberlain in twenty-four hours framed his answer; and he enforced this text—"that for

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the present at any rate our greatest interest in South Africa is peace, and that all our policy must be directed to this object".

IX

For once in these pages a private dispatch of his must be given nearly in full: he never wrote a greater:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

March 16, 1898.— . . . When you left England we decided that our policy should be to avoid, if possible, all causes of offence with the Transvaal, and accordingly, while firmly maintaining our rights under the Convention if they were seriously challenged, to avoid any public pressure in regard to less important grievances. The considerations on which our policy was based were:

(1) The conviction that a war with the Transvaal would certainly rouse race antagonism in the Cape Colony[1] and leave behind it the most serious difficulties in the way of South African union. We felt that if a struggle was to come it was most important that the Transvaal should be the aggressor, and that the Imperial Government should have the active sympathy of at all events a considerable section of the Dutch in the Colony.

(2) We felt that the Raid had placed this country in a false position and had alienated the confidence of the Afrikander party, and that it would be desirable that the irritation caused by this event should pass away before we resumed any pressure upon the Transvaal in regard to its internal policy.

(3) We were of opinion that the waiting game was the best for this country as time must be on our side. The mis-government in the Transvaal will in the long run produce opposition within its borders, and when the present rule of President Kruger comes to an end, as it must do before many years are over, we might confidently look for an improvement in the position.

(4) A war with the Transvaal, unless upon the utmost and clearest provocation, would be extremely unpopular in this country. It would involve the despatch of a very large force and the expenditure of many millions.

Now, all these considerations are as weighty as they were when you

[1] As we remember, this feeling on Chamberlain's part went back to the early 'eighties.

left, and even if no other complications had arisen, I should still feel that we must endure a great deal rather than provoke a conflict.

I recognise that the temper of the Transvaal authorities has not improved, and that their insolence and neglect of friendly representations is most irritating, but all my information goes to show that the Dutch party in the Cape, and a very large section of the English party also, are not prepared to welcome Imperial interference; and the whole cost and responsibility of the war would have to be borne by the Imperial Government, who would be obliged to count upon the apathy, and probably the active opposition, of a considerable proportion of our own subjects. I think, therefore, that there is no reason at present for changing the policy which you have hitherto pursued, and while taking note of all the causes of offence which the Boers are constantly giving us, we must refrain from pressing these in any public or peremptory fashion.

Following out this view, I am not inclined to take up the cause of the late Chief Justice, nor to make any demands upon the Transvaal which, if refused, we should be obliged to support by force. Most of the grievances of which we have to complain are of a character which would not excite great sympathy in this country, and they would not be considered as sufficient to constitute a *casus belli*.

It is possible that the Transvaal may be emboldened by impunity to proceed further, and may try our patience too far. But I desire emphatically to repeat that they must be clearly in the wrong on some serious question before we can interfere.

As regards the suzerainty question, it is quite possible that they may reject our interpretation, but of this I am disposed to take scant notice. As long as they do not infringe the articles of the Convention of 1884, the interpretation of the Preamble of 1881 is really an academic question. I should, therefore, maintain my interpretation, but say that the question will not arise in a practical shape until by their action they ignore or controvert any of the articles of the Second Convention. . . .

I have hitherto spoken of the position entirely without regard to the general Imperial outlook, but I need hardly add that this affords a very strong addition to the arguments in favour of a policy of reserve and delay. We have in hand difficulties of the most serious character with France, Russia and Germany. We are engaged in an important expedition in the Soudan; and it is uncertain as yet whether the war on the North-west frontier of India has been finally concluded.

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We may emerge from all these troubles without a war, but I cannot conceal from myself that the prospect is more gloomy than it has ever been in my recollection.

I have no doubt that if we were to get into serious conflict with any of the Powers, the Boers would be tempted to take advantage of our difficulties and to declare their independence. I do not fear this. It would be a small addition to more serious troubles, and would give us an opportunity to settle the South African question once for all. We might have for a short time to assume a defensive position, but the Boers would gain nothing by waiting.

Accordingly, I wish to emphasise the fact that, for the present at any rate, our greatest interest in South Africa is peace; and that all our policy must be directed to this object.

Nor was it possible to leave Milner without information or direction until this exposition of Ministerial policy could reach Milner by ship. The Colonial Secretary cables to Cape Town that Peace is the pole-star:

March 19.—*Secret.*—The principal object of H.M. Government in S. Africa at present is peace. Nothing but a most flagrant offence would justify the use of force. I do not believe that Kotze can properly claim redress under Convention, and, if not, his arrest, however arbitrary, would not be sufficient ground for intervention as he is not a British subject.[1]

Chamberlain, hitherto both receptive and indulgent, had put down his foot in his way. For the British Government, at that of all moments, a forcing policy in South Africa would have been insanity. Milner, if at home, would have seen this in five minutes. In the world-circumstances, it would have been more likely than any step before—or after—to bring about the creation of a Continental *bloc*. Yet to Milner, at an ocean's length, a policy at home of drift, as he was tempted wrongly to think it, meant consolidating the Dutch "Triple Alliance", with perhaps the loss of South Africa to the Empire should a world-conflict rage in the next few years.

The Colonial Secretary's injunction of strict restraint for an indefinite period could not be other than grating and sometimes

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 226.

galling for two who had to follow it in South Africa. At a distance of thousands of miles, it was impossible for the High Commissioner at Cape Town, still less for the British agent at Pretoria, to understand the whole web of British policy or do justice—in this vexing ordeal for them—to a Chief who upheld them in every actual emergency and whose command of public opinion was their only solid mainstay. In that respect he carried them on his back, and never reminded them of it. They even thought he "hesitated". It was not exactly his trait, though none knew better how to bide his hour, and when he chose, to keep his own counsel, despite his explosive vernacular at other times. Conyngham Greene at home, on leave from Pretoria, could remark weakly:

> *July* 22.— . . . Chamberlain will *not* do anything, owing to the fear that the party would suffer by proposing a line of policy which would not command the support of the Opposition or even of a certain number of the supporters of the Government. There is no question, I gather, of our being in complications abroad. . . .

It is not easy to imagine a more light-headed letter. What of the supposed absence of complications abroad? The irksome transactions with Germany on Delagoa Bay and the future of the Portuguese colonies were only beginning, while Omdurman had yet to be fought, and it was known that a French expedition might be found encamped on the Upper Nile under the tricolour. By no means yet was German neutrality secured in the Transvaal question. Unwitting how shallow was his subordinate's version, the High Commissioner commented:

> More serious, of course, is the state of mind of the C.O. as you describe it, according as it does, absolutely, with all that I have heard from them lately.[1]

It was high time that personal contact between Chamberlain and Milner should be restored. There was at that stage no rational policy, but that continued patience which the whole Unionist Cabinet knew to be imperative and the Colonial Secretary strictly commanded.

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 236-237 (Letters between Greene and Milner, July and August 1898).

X

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In a word, while Kruger raised his armaments and the relative British position in South Africa declined, Milner was to mark time, and upon no account to "work up to a crisis". From the moment of receiving these instructions he longed to sail for England as soon as he might arrange. Partly with irksome suppression, partly with singular outspokenness, he answered:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

March 22, 1898.—I have so often wished lately that I could be admitted to your study for half an hour. . . . You may rely on me not to do anything to render the situation more acute. It is exceedingly difficult in view of the aggressive and insolent temper of the Transvaal to pass the time without a quarrel and yet without too conspicuously eating humble pie. Still, I hope we may manage, by a judicious combination of caution and bluff, to worry on without discredit until we are in a better position to "round" upon them. The awkward thing is that they have it in their power at any time to make an attitude of forbearance on our part no longer possible. If they thought our hands were *quite full*, they would be down upon us at once for a certainty, for they are armed to the teeth and their heart is black. But they are *not quite convinced* that it's safe, and that doubt in their minds may just prevent their doing anything very flagrant.

When we are once more in quieter waters it will be for Her Majesty's Government to consider whether we ought to acquiesce permanently in the situation of having a strong and bitter enemy for ever seated on our flank, only waiting for the occasion of our being definitely involved elsewhere in order to fly at our throats.

For the present time there is no more to be said on that subject. I know where I am and shall act accordingly. . . .

And this is no ebullition, no bubble on Milner's part. His conviction is final that there will be no improvement without either war itself, or—which he thinks far more likely—Kruger's surrender at a stern summons rather than try conclusions with the might of Britain.

Early in May he felt ready to request leave, needed for reasons other than political. After twelve months of it, he was over-

worked and frayed with cares. He had slaved at his task to the weakening of his eyes, and needed the services of a European oculist. He proposed to come home at such a date as would ensure meeting his chief, preferably in early autumn.

As, though I am asking for *private* leave with private objects, I do attach great value to a personal discussion of the political outlook here.[1]

Chamberlain replies with almost paternal gentleness. He thinks he will be in England at the time but cannot be sure. As much as any man, let us remark, he will need himself a change at the end of the session. But he wishes that nothing on his side shall interfere with the High Commissioner's home-coming. Very quietly the Colonial Secretary conveys by inference, not emphasis, that his line of policy is unaltered:

Nothing as you know is further from our wishes than any further conflict, and the changes that would satisfy us absolutely are not such as to involve any sacrifice on the part of the South African Republic. . . .[2]

Nor is he ruffled by the latest Boer repudiation of suzerainty in the abstract—"it does not matter two straws to me".

XI

The High Commissioner's leave was postponed for long by events. It is essential to understand something of what happened in South Africa before he fixed his departure, when assured of a meeting with his chief.

Sir Gordon Sprigg's Ministry, after long trimming to the Bond, challenged pitched battle on a Redistribution Bill to correct the under-representation of the British in the towns. Defeated on a vote of No Confidence, Sprigg dissolved instead of resigning. This was in June. The electoral campaign raged for two months. The contest seemed anybody's game.

The Colonial Secretary thought as we know that the races would be more deeply split by the resurgence of Rhodes as the inspirer of the "Progressive" and Imperial party. He could not rouse unbounded enthusiasm amongst the British without

[1] May 1898 (received 28th). Chamberlain Papers.

[2] Chamberlain to Milner, June 3, 1898.

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equal antagonism amongst the Dutch. But in these elections his was not the gabble of the political hack. Not unfairly he stated the issue as he saw it. Still, he was above them all as the prophet of South African unity. He did not recant his old admiration for the Afrikander Bond, but trusted that it was not absorbing any further Krugerism from the Transvaal. If it were, that meant "the Queen against Kruger". As the Bond saw it the issue was rather "Rhodes against Kruger". More than ever the Dutch in the lump believed—as Milner had put it just after his coming—that "we meant to 'jump' the Transvaal". Their sentiment was "Hands off the Transvaal". That sentiment, human in itself, was no solution for a mixed problem; no remedy for a regime whereof Merriman—shortly to be a member of the Bond Ministry—had so recently written, "Such a state of affairs cannot last, it must break down from inherent rottenness".

To the Colonial Secretary came the Governor's running comments on the political campaign:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

June 15, 1898.— . . . But the irony does not end there. . . . We may thus live to see the Boer oligarchy of the Transvaal encouraged in its policy of withholding all political rights from the British inhabitants of that country by the Government of a British Colony in which, owing to the concession of equal and indeed more than equal rights to the Boer inhabitants, the latter have gained the upper hand. By these means the complete ascendancy of unprogressive and Republican Boerdom in South African politics would be—for the time being—satisfactorily established. . . .[1]

June 29, 1898.— . . . What we have gained in any case is that the Cape Colony shall be neutral in any future quarrels with the Transvaal, that the Bond party will have to reckon for the first time with an anti-Bond party at least equally strong. Beyond that I don't go. Rhodes and the Rhodesite clique habitually over-represent his personal influence with the Dutchmen. It is *confined to individuals—nil* on the mass, the great ignorant purely rustic mass. . . . Greene[2] is here sailing to-day. His account of the state of affairs in the Transvaal is gloomy in the extreme, though not worse than I expected. I hope he will speak as

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 256-257. [2] The British Agent at Pretoria.

freely to you as he does to me, for I feel you ought to know the blackness of the outlook, even if you do not see your way to better it by our direct actions.[1]

July 20.— . . . It is becoming evident that Transvaal party here, in its attack upon the Sprigg ministry, showed its hand too clearly. The ravings of *Ons Land* had gone too far. There is a distinct tendency to "back water", very noticeable in Schreiner's manifesto and speeches, and a fresh outpouring of the usual declarations of "loyalty". . . . It would be rather awkward if in the middle of all this "flapdoodle" the Transvaal were to be seen violently quarrelling with H.M.'s Government. Therefore the signal has been made to Pretoria to be "conciliatory", and the effect is visible in many ways. . . . I am not sure that this change is altogether a good thing. If I thought it meant any real change of feeling I should welcome it. As it is I fear that it may just turn the Election . . . and when it has served its purpose we shall see no more of it. . . .[2]

September 20 (extract from confidential dispatch).— . . . The result is that out of 79 seats 39 have fallen to the "Progressives", or supporters of the Ministry, 40 to the Bond or, as they prefer to be called, the "Afrikander" party. . . . The election has been fought with extraordinary keenness—the numbers going to the poll being quite without parallel in the history of the Colony—and I doubt not there has been a good deal of sharp practice, not confined to one party. . . .

A solid "progressive" opposition of 38 or 39 would make the tenure of a Bond Ministry an extremely precarious one, and would absolutely preclude the possibility of such a Ministry adopting any extreme policy. . . .[3]

Looking back we can see that sinister was the racial spirit of this electoral grapple. Rhodes largely financed the "Progressives". Transvaal money nourished the "Afrikanders". Amidst mutual charges of corruption and machination, bitterness between the two white races outlasted the polls, and was exasperated for months by the election petitions.

The High Commissioner with fine scorn frustrated a wire-pulling scheme of the Rhodes group to keep in Sprigg and keep out the Bond, whose prospective majority was now increased to two or three. In mid-October, Schreiner formed a very dexterous

[1] Chamberlain Papers. [2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 264-265.
[3] *Ibid.* pp. 275-277.

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Ministry, which was soon to vote an annual contribution of £30,000 to the Imperial Navy.

XII

When that Ministry was installed, Milner, straining under repeated delays, could leave at last. One part of his South African career was completed. Pending the result of personal consultation with the Colonial Secretary, his next course could not be clearly discerned. Some things put him in better heart; others confirmed his view that the British position in South Africa was at hazard. However overworked, he felt relieved about his eyes. Many years afterwards they were still to serve him and the empire in far other circumstances. Again, after Omdurman and Fashoda, British repute was raised in the world, and British policy at need could act in South Africa with freer hands. He cabled to his chief:

October 25 (telegram).—Press telegraphic service so bad that you may not realise interest felt here in question of Nile Valley. Unanimous resolution of House of Assembly congratulating on recent victory represents wide-spread feeling. That victory produced great political effect through South Africa. However remote it may appear, British control of Nile Valley from Lakes to Sea undoubtedly affects position here and would be welcomed by both sides except by downright rebels. Anti-British press manifests significant anxiety to see France maintain herself on Upper Nile.[1]

Prompt was Chamberlain's answer:

I share your views as to Nile valley from Lakes to Sea and believe control will be assured to Great Britain.

What, then, of Milner's graver reflections? With open eyes he had refused to hinder Schreiner's access to office. The Bond Ministry would hamper British dealings with the Transvaal. Yet the very existence of that Ministry as a symbol of Dutch status was another argument for white equality in the Transvaal as in Cape Colony. Unless that principle were recognised there would be no unity or peace in South Africa. Milner had no

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 271.

hope of its recognition at Pretoria, unless the full weight of British intervention were once more imminent. Then the Boers, probably, would yield; but the worse contingency would have to be risked. Deepened every day was his belief, since Kruger's re-election, that the Transvaal question must come to "Reform or War".

Two phases were behind him. What of a third? The first half of his time in South Africa had been the phase of hope. The second half had been the constrained phase of marking time. Would he be empowered on his return to open a phase of action? These were the workings of Milner's mind when writing to the Colonial Secretary the last of his letters before his home-coming:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

October 19.— . . . I am even more anxious to get home on public grounds, for now that I really know what is going on here, I am very anxious that you should know it, and I could convey more correct impressions in a couple of hours conversation than I can ever hope to by any number of despatches.

Just now there is a lull in our eternal fight with the Transvaal. But we are no nearer a solution. . . .[1]

Before this communication, marked "Very confidential", could reach the Colonial Office matters were hastened. Chamberlain, just returned from the United States, was working with utmost determination, as already described, to include in the British sphere the whole Nile Valley. The High Commissioner, so far away, might well suppose that for a year past his Chief had been engrossed by the Niger and the Gold Coast, by the Nile and the Sudan—by every part of Africa but South Africa. It was not so. Milner before returning could not guess what these pages have disclosed, the energy of the Colonial Secretary's efforts on issues crucially concerning South Africa—Delagoa Bay and German neutrality. Free as he had not been since the Raid to concentrate on the Transvaal question, he now desired to hear as soon as possible the High Commissioner's case.

More administrative hitches in connection with the new state of Cape politics threatened yet again to put off Milner's voyage.

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 287.

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Chamberlain cabled that he must come home at once. Early in May 1897 he had landed at Cape Town from the *Norham Castle*. At the beginning of November 1898 he sailed in the *Scot*. To his highly wrought, tense and authoritative nature, the eighteen months between must have seemed like many years. Seldom can a man on a homeward voyage have been so closely engaged with thoughts on what might be.

CHAPTER LXIV

A SHOT IN THE DARK

(1898–1899)

MILNER at Home—Chamberlain still refuses to force the pace: but will not shrink at need—The Unexpected Happens—A Workman's Death makes History—Chamberlain and Rhodes: the Last Encounter—Chamberlain's "Dynamite" Dispatch and Pretoria's Blunder—New Agitation on the Rand and Sweeping Consequences—Democracy not Capitalism—The Uitlanders' Petition and the Colonial Secretary—Quandary of the Unionist Cabinet—Yea or Nay?—Milner and the "Helots"—Chamberlain's Dispatch accepts the Petition but proposes Conference.

I

THE Colonial Secretary had been on a full round of speech-making at Manchester, where he did not mention South Africa. Then he went to his own city to push on his work of creating the new Birmingham University. He was there when Milner wrote in his diary: "*Friday, November* 18.—Home—Happy." A few days later, Chamberlain came up to town for a Cabinet. The day after that he and the High Commissioner shook hands once more.[1]

The proconsul returned was disappointed by first talks with the Minister, who was very kind but by no means disposed to abandon the policy of patience. Milner's impression is that "the 'no-war' policy is still in favour in the highest quarters". Again, "About the Transvaal he [the Minister] was not satisfactory, though very complimentary to myself".[2]

Milner visited Highbury. The gathering there during the first week-end of December was an informal Council of State. It included not only the High Commissioner and his second the

[1] At the Colonial Office on the afternoon of Tuesday, November 22, 1898.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 298-299 (November 25 and November 30, 1898).

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British Agent at Pretoria, but Lord Selborne and other members, political and permanent, of the Colonial Office staff. The host was a rare good listener as we have had occasion to remark, and he could be swiftly responsive. But it is certain that at the close of this week-end discussion, and after some later conversations, his mind remained his own. For the Colonial Secretary had to consider the whole complex of British policy with its constant dependence for success on the steadiness or advance of public opinion. The proconsul was engrossed by his own sphere and surcharged with conviction. It was impossible that at this juncture they could see South Africa in the same light.

The issue between the two men was rather tacit than confessed. It concerned not principle but method. The High Commissioner stated the alternatives without disguising his preference. When he returned to South Africa what spirit was he to represent? Was it to be passive or active? "Am I to work a passive and dilatory policy with the best credit I can, or am I to go back to pursue an active and resolute policy even at the risk of its leading to war?"[1] Milner's papers since published show that his own view had never swerved a jot during the long compulsion to mark time since his strenuous but unwelcome letter to the Colonial Secretary just before the Graaf Reinet speech. Still he held that the inescapable issue between the Transvaal and the Empire was "Reform or War"; and still he desired to "work up to a crisis".

Chamberlain agreed that things could not indefinitely go on as they were. Sooner or later final crisis on the business must arise. When it arose he would know how to deal with it. Meanwhile, he would do nothing which might precipitate or accelerate the last arbitrament. There had been two sides to his record on South Africa, and he was conscious of both. No one had ever warned the House of Commons more gravely as to what war in that quarter would mean. "It would be in the nature of a civil war . . . and it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations would hardly be long enough to extinguish."[2] On the other hand, apart from Milner, he had

[1] Lord Milner's recollection in conversation with the present writer.

[2] House of Commons, May 8, 1896, Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xl. cols. 914-915.

faced war with the Transvaal three times and each time had won success with peace—once under the second Gladstone Government in 1884, when he secured the Warren Expedition to clear the Boer conquistadors out of Bechuanaland; again when his ultimatum reopened the Vaal "drifts" in the late autumn of 1895; and yet again in the spring of 1897 when he took stern issue on the Aliens Immigration Law as a breach of the Convention.

In each of these cases, he had waited for the conclusive case and the sure occasion, and had made no mistake.

II

Biding his time Chamberlain did not regard as a weakness. It was his method. That the situation in the Transvaal might prove untenable before long he agreed; but that was no reason for hastening a crash. He had not cared a rush about verbiage on suzerainty. On that abstract proposition he had never dreamed of action. He had moved only when breaches of the Convention were committed by the Boers. The Colonial Secretary's sense of method as differentiated from Milner's might be expressed as follows: "Our policy is not to *bring* things to a crisis. Let them *come* to a crisis. The Boers must put themselves in the wrong." This last characteristic maxim was the core of his mind; for if matters came to the worst or to the chance of the worst, by far the greatest asset—more important than any resource within South Africa itself—would be a sufficiently united and determined Britain. For this reason, the policy of patience up to some further point was the true and solid policy of strength.

Nothing could induce Chamberlain at the moment to go further or say more, and Milner had to be as content as he might. None the less one assurance at least was made doubly sure for the High Commissioner. If the situation came to danger, he would be supported through thick and thin. He would never be let down. The fate of Sir Bartle Frere never would be his so long as Chamberlain dominated at home.

Just at the time of Milner's visit Chamberlain was at the height of his European celebrity. The admirable articles by

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Victor Bérard on the "man of Birmingham" as the "man of Empire" were appearing in the *Revue de Paris*. By contrast with this fame for force and achievement, the moderation of his views on South Africa is shown by his private correspondence. Now as always since the Raid he still thought "Home Rule for the Rand" by far the best way of reconciling reform with the independence of the Republic. It was after his first long talk with the High Commissioner that he wrote to the Prime Minister, who had enquired about the rumours of a loan to be raised by the Transvaal in London.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

40 *Prince's Gardens, November* 30, 1898.—Lord Rothschild called here yesterday with a similar enquiry to that of Lord Harris—who also called on me at the Colonial Office. The latter said that he had seen you and that you had told him that the policy of the Government was to keep the peace with Kruger unless he were very outrageous—with which declaration I assured him I heartily agreed. . . . I said that in my opinion he would be very foolish to lend a sixpence to Kruger, unless he could get in return the assurance of substantial reforms in the administration, and I suggested that the Reform which would be the least offensive to Kruger and at the same time of most practical advantage to the Uitlanders would be the grant of full municipal rights to Johannesburg including control of education, sanitation and the police. . . .

"To keep the peace with Kruger unless he were very outrageous." This good letter disposes of suggestions from that day to this, especially in Afrikander literature, that Chamberlain was a plotting foe of the Boers, and that when Milner left England again at the end of January 1899, he was expressly authorised by a bitter and wicked Minister to work up to war. The contrary is shown by the High Commissioner's own comment written aboard ship: "*My views are absolutely unaltered*, but I have come to the conclusion that having stated them, it is no use trying to force them upon others at this stage. If I can advance matters by my own actions, as I still hope I may be able to do, I believe that I shall have support when the time comes."[1]

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 301-302 (Milner to Selborne, January 31, 1899).

Chamberlain and the Unionist Government had not the faintest anticipation at this beginning of 1899 that there would be war in South Africa before the end of it.

III

Yet already a shot had been fired, and an Uitlander had been killed. Discussion of contingencies was superseded by an outbreak of events, before the High Commissioner reappeared in South Africa.

On Christmas Eve the Colonial Office had received brief news of the Edgar case and the fatal shot—a flash that did its work amongst the explosive material of Uitlander discontent. There was a shock but at first as if only one powder-barrel had blown up. The fiery particles scattered and caught. One grievance after another ignited and flared.

Even a little meddling with human life may have dire effects when general feeling has smouldered long. The death of an Archduke precipitated the World War. The death of a working man brought on, more slowly but as surely, the Boer War.

There was a midnight brawl amidst very ordinary Johannesburg surroundings. Tom Edgar, boiler-maker—a first-rate worker at his trade and popular amongst his fellows—was a man of powerful physique and mettlesome temper. Coming home late he meets three other persons, and thinks himself insulted by one of them who calls out a Dutch term applicable to dogs.[1] With one blow of his fist he fells the man who said "Voetzak"; a little man, ailing and very drunk, who now lies senseless on the ground while his mates clamour. This takes place in the dark, near Edgar's own door in the narrow passage of "Florrie's Buildings", where he and his wife live. Loud in the dark is the battery of one of the mines near. While the mates of the prostrate man cry "Police", neighbours throw up windows or come into the street. Four of the armed police arrive and talking in Dutch tell Edgar, who has locked his door, to come out. He will not. Then having no warrant, nor sending for a magistrate, they break open the door. The policeman Jones—Stephanus Jones,[2] his odd

[1] This account is from the Blue Book, C.9345, pp. 108-158.

[2] His father was said to have been one of Queen Victoria's coachmen and afterwards joined the burgher police.

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Boer name—is the first in the doorway and meets Edgar, who hits him with a lightish stick tipped by an iron nut. The knot of people outside see a flash and hear a woman scream.

Jones had shot Edgar mortally through the chest and he died at once in his wife's arms, who was just behind him. The constable who fired had only received a couple of scalp-cuts. Edgar could have been arrested. His escape was impossible. Mrs. Edgar and her infant girl were left destitute.

Stephanus Jones was arrested for murder, but the charge was reduced next day to manslaughter. He was released on nominal bail. At his trial a couple of months later he was acquitted, and left the court without a mark on his scalp or a stain on his character. The presiding judge commended the verdict in the "hope that the police under difficult circumstances will always know how to do their duty".

How idle is it to argue that the historic consequences of the shot in the dark at "Florrie's Buildings", Johannesburg, ought not to have been what they were. The killing of Tom Edgar did work in fact like the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Some dramatic and moving symbol concerning individual fate under a bad system of rule is most apt to set great forces in motion. As Milner once said to the present writer, "When the cup is full it matters little what drop brims it over". He wrote officially months afterwards when South African excitements and alarms were at a pitch, "The present crisis undoubtedly arises out of the Edgar incident".[1]

For the mass of the Uitlanders this case raised the whole grievance of the police. Recruited almost entirely amongst the young Dutch burghers, often ignorant of English, despising the motley strangers, equipped themselves with loaded revolvers, they were like a foreign guard amidst a subject population.

IV

From the killing of Edgar and from the impunity of the killer sprang at once the second reform agitation on the Rand. Open-air meetings and processions were forbidden, but on Christmas Eve some thousands of British subjects assembled in Market

[1] Dispatch of May 4, 1899, C.9345, p. 210.

Square, Johannesburg, and then, moving in a body to the office of the British Vice-Consul, they handed to him the first Uitlander petition to the Queen.

At once the Boer Government struck at the promoters of the petition. Messrs. Dodd and Webb, secretary and treasurer of the local branch of the South African League, were arrested for unlawful assembly, and the bail exacted for each was £1000, five times the sum just before required for Jones who shot Edgar. Uitlander feeling was further inflamed a few days after Christmas when a subsidised Government sheet, *De Rand Post*, advocated a little more killing on grounds of human economy. "Mounted police can and must disperse such gatherings, and, if necessary, there must be some shooting done. . . . To this Johannesburg rebellion an end must be put, once and for all. . . . Let us shoot down a pair of these wirepullers and thereby spare ourselves a formal war."[1]

Indoor meetings at least were legal and supposed safe from attack. To this limited right the British now resorted, not without asking and obtaining official consent. In mid-January they assembled in the large circus-like building of iron and wood grandly called the Amphitheatre. The meeting was wrecked by organised bodies of Boers including some minor State officials and policemen in plain clothes. The furniture was demolished and the audience driven out. Several of the Queen's subjects were seriously injured.

Whatever the abstract merits, Boer management of the new situation hardly could have been cruder. Force this time could not quell. The spreading cry amongst the British was "We have no voice in the Government of the country". The man who raised that cry with most effect, perhaps the finest spirit amongst them all, was one whom the present writer remembers well from early association—Tom Dodd of Northumberland. Who was he? Dodd was a mechanical engineer; no jingo, no Chamberlainite, but through and through a Radical and a Home Ruler, and one who might have gone far in democratic politics had he stayed at home and lived. But he had taken up a cause he was to die for.[2]

[1] Pratt, *Leading Points in South African History*, p. 241.

[2] As Major Dodd he died of enteric fever on active service during the South African War; but died near Johannesburg.

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His countenance displayed a direct, lively nature and an intent courage, without a tincture of fanatical sourness. He was one of those souls who, as is said, are "born free" and he looked it. It was unendurable to a man of his type and antecedents that he should work and be taxed without having as free a voice and vote in that mixed State as any Boer. Now, he and his close comrades were going to carry with them the best of the Rand workmen. This movement was independent of the capitalists.

Meanwhile, what had become of the petition to the Queen presented to the British Vice-Consul at Johannesburg on Christmas Eve? In Milner's absence at home, the Acting High Commissioner, General Sir William Butler, declined to receive the petition, and contemned the signatories. Of him, accordingly, we shall hear more. Lately this chivalrous and prepossessed Irish soldier had been appointed to the South African command without the Colonial Secretary's knowledge and to his dismay. Butler was an extraordinary *locum tenens*. He regarded Chamberlain, Milner, Rhodes and the Uitlanders with comprehensive indignation. When in his irate fervour he rejected the first Johannesburg petition, he helped much to set on foot a greater with an effect he little dreamed. He had to be rebuked by the Colonial Secretary, but nothing could abate his quixotic imaginings nor rein his tilting pen.

When the first reports of the Edgar case reached Downing Street, Chamberlain saw at once that something ominous might have happened; but he did not receive the full reports until nearly three months after Edgar's fate. By that time the forces let loose were sweeping ahead.

V

A curious interlude here destroys a mischievous myth. Many writers have assumed without evidence, and it is still a common opinion, that at this period of South African policy the "Chartered gang" had some occult but pervasive influence upon the Unionist Government in general and especially on the Colonial Office. The suspicion is baseless and contrary to the truth.

During the latter part of Milner's visit, and again in the spring afterwards, Rhodes too was in London. For nearly a year he

had been off and on in communication with the Colonial Office. Chamberlain, as we know, regarded him as a great figure in Imperial enterprise; as an unsound influence in politics; and as a financier with whom statesmen at home must hold their own. This view was indulgent by comparison with that of some other Ministers.

The details are not for these pages.[1] What Rhodes wanted through the influence of the Colonial Office was a Treasury guarantee enabling him to raise at Government rates of interest a couple of millions or more—perhaps £3,000,000—partly for extending his line, partly for converting his existing mass of debentures. The British Government at that time could borrow at 2½ per cent. Rhodes visited the Colonial Office on this glittering errand. Presently, indiscreet newspaper paragraphs suggested that the guarantee was virtually gained. Chamberlain was not committed. He was more attracted than any other member of the Government by the Cape to Cairo vision. Nevertheless he stipulated that the Cape Government should participate in the scheme, sharing in intermediate liabilities as well as ultimate advantages. Something like this had been at first the desire of Rhodes himself. Now, nothing could be more abhorrent to him than the thought of having to go cap in hand to the Bond Ministry or being dependent on its favour in any way.

This was not the worst. To be reckoned with was the British Treasury, formidable amongst human institutions. Cerberus appeared in the shape of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Black Michael" flatly declined to touch the original proposals, and spoke to Rhodes as few men ever had dared for many years past. It was not an interview but a row—a jest for days in Downing Street, but it made a wind of wrath in Cork Street, where Rhodes had his headquarters. He declared that the Chancellor was a man of no imagination and no manners.

At this moment Chamberlain was removed from the scene by one of his worst attacks of gout and detained at Highbury for some weeks, but one letter entertained him:

[1] Long letters from Rhodes to Chamberlain, April 28, 1898, and January 17, 1899. See also Howard Hensman's *Cecil Rhodes* (1901), pp. 298-315.

BALFOUR TO CHAMBERLAIN

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February 2, 1899.—A very distressing scene, by Rhodes's story, has occurred between him and Beach. The latter treated him to a specimen of his best manner with the result that Rhodes declares himself insulted, told Beach he ought to be ashamed of himself (!); and really feels the matter so acutely that in giving me an account of it he almost wept with rage! I have never seen a man so moved—yet of all this Beach is wholly unconscious.

The Colonial Secretary answers that he has been "weak and depressed", but there is no sign of this in his comment. "It is a great pity that Rhodes and Beach should have had such a turn-up, but Rhodes is very unreasonable in the way he expects all his demands to be taken on trust, and Beach—well, Beach is Beach." On the next occasion, that blunt guardian of the public purse was still quite "unconscious" and ruder than before. Rhodes went to Egypt and Berlin, and on returning to London resumed negotiations with the Colonial Office. Nothing came of them.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was inflexible: "I have seen enough of the men who control the Company and their methods, from Mr. Rhodes downwards, to mistrust them utterly".[1] Hicks-Beach did not believe in the Cape to Cairo route; doubted whether its projector believed in it; and surmised that the real game was to send up shares by creating the impression that the Chartered Company was to be reinforced by Imperial credit.

The Colonial Secretary protested against this anathema, yet insisted on his own "necessary condition that the Cape Government should jointly undertake with us a fair proportion, viz. one-third of the risk and responsibility". Rhodes would not conform. He insisted that the Imperial guarantee would never be a real charge; that in no case, now, ought a Bond Ministry to have a voice in his plans. To soften the Treasury and coax Cerberus Chamberlain had taken considerable trouble in this affair. But he was done with it if Rhodes still refused the "necessary condition":

[1] Hicks-Beach to Chamberlain, April 18, 1899.

CHAMBERLAIN TO RHODES

CHAP. LXIV. ÆT. 62.

Colonial Office, April 27, 1899.—DEAR MR. RHODES, There is not the least chance of the consent of H.M.G. to substitute the guarantee of the Chartered Co. for that of the Cape Government. The co-operation of the Cape Government has always been a *sine qua non*. I shall be glad to see you at the House of Commons to-morrow immediately after questions, but I think it right to let you know at once that the point about Cape contribution is a cardinal one.

Rhodes said, "Chamberlain wanted the earth and he couldn't have it".[1] Chamberlain might as well have said that Rhodes wanted the moon. He could not have the use of Imperial credit on his own terms or expect to get all his own way in dealing with the Colonial Secretary. Some further conversations showed that there was nothing to be done. There was no quarrel, though there was no love lost.

Amongst trans-continental railways the Cape to Cairo plan remains an unfinished symphony. A parting conversation on the subject took place at the House of Commons on a Thursday afternoon towards the middle of May 1899. Chamberlain and Rhodes never met again. By that time war was a plain possibility in South Africa, but the most strenuous efforts for peace were beginning. We must see what had happened in little more than three months.

VI

In February the Transvaal Government received Chamberlain's dispatch on the dynamite monopoly. This was a trenchant but not a threatening document. It reviewed the working of the Concession, condemned as bad in itself and as infringing the Convention:

. . . Her Majesty's Government feel that they must no longer delay to make known their view of the matter to the Government of the South African Republic and to protest not only against the prolongation of a monopoly which they hold to be inconsistent with the provisions of the London Convention, but against any further delay in taking steps to

[1] Howard Hensman, *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 315.

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cancel the concession, or so to reform it that it may be exercised in good faith for the benefit of the State. . . .[1]

Kruger and his advisers, rejecting this contention, were none the less disturbed by Chamberlain's reservation of the right to intervene. For other reasons they were in a fix. They wanted a loan but it could not be raised without repairing confidence. The capitalists had offered publicly to expropriate the Dynamite Company on terms so advantageous to the State as well as the mines that the Volksraad itself began to be attracted. Disquieting again was the growing movement on the Rand for a greater petition to the Queen. The Boer executive conceived a clever plan. The idea was not only to checkmate the Imperial Government but to oust it by a double move. Why not square the capitalists by a direct deal; and divide the Uitlanders by nominal franchise reform? "Peace negotiations", purporting to aim at a happy political compromise as well as an economic settlement, were opened through the leading "houses" at Johannesburg.

That the main purpose was to keep control of the explosives the President's speeches leave no doubt. "The dynamite factory was the principal thing in their independence." "The position to-day was such that if we require to-morrow 1,000,000 cartridges for Martini-Henry rifles we could get them . . . if a dispute arose with foreign countries and their gates were shut." "It would also soon be in a position to make cartridges for all the new patterns of rifles." "If they did away with the dynamite factory the powder factory went with it."[2] As regards the prospect in the event of war he could say that they had enough material at the factory for three years.

None the less the proposals to the mining interests seemed alluring at first sight. The gold-owners were to be reconciled to the dynamite monopoly by the offer of valuable facilities for extending and enriching their properties. The finances of the Republic were to be reorganised on expert advice. Bought off in this way, the magnates were to repudiate the new reform movement amongst the rank and file of the British Uitlanders and to throw in their weight with the Government. On his part

[1] C.9317, No. 1, pp. 6-7 (Chamberlain to Sir W. F. Butler, acting High Commissioner, January 13, 1899).

[2] Blue Book of June 1899, C.9345, pp. 193-203. Translations of the official text of President Kruger's speeches, March 17.

President Kruger offered the distant prospect of a very limited extension of the franchise. Thus real reform would be evaded, the monopoly secured, the British Uitlanders discomfited and Chamberlain's dispatch stultified.[1] The capitalists soon saw that high interest in the financial sense might mean bad political security. They were asked to uphold the dynamite monopoly which was obnoxious to themselves and condemned by the British Government. Their subserviency on the franchise would make them more unpopular amongst the mass of the Uitlanders.

In this dilemma they consulted their London agents, and these communicated with Chamberlain. He advised them to think well what they were about. The temptation of immediate gain might lure them into a fool's bargain. Without some real political settlement there would be no firm ground. The agitation would continue until one or the other alternative were attained—"Home Rule for the Rand", which he still thought the most rational compromise; or speedier and wider enlargement of the general franchise in the Transvaal than Pretoria seemed to mean.

In a few weeks the "peace negotiations" broke down. The capitalists declared franchise reform to be "the vital point upon which a permanent and peaceful settlement must hinge".[2] Irrevocable was the effect. Arising from Chamberlain's warning on the dynamite question the attempted "great deal" between the Boer Government and the "houses" had led to a result the very opposite of the design. The issue was simplified for the whole Uitlander community. They demanded early and substantial reform. A plain five years' qualification, retrospective as well as prospective, became their watchword. By itself this claim might have been helpless. But—as matters stood after the last week of March 1899—it reinforced another influence which was to prove decisive.

VII

Tom Dodd, the Northumbrian Radical, and his friends had happened upon an idea and fastened to it. If they could get

[1] For this episode see above all Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within* (1899), pp. 342-360. Fitzpatrick took an important part in the negotiations.

[2] March 27, 1899. Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from Within*, p. 348.

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general support, they would bring the Imperial Government to "Yea" or "Nay". Their idea was to revive in earnest, though in circumstances so strange, one of the most ancient rights of British subjects: to petition the Crown for redress; and to represent their case this time in a fashion not lightly to be set aside.

The first hurried petition tendered on Christmas Eve after the Edgar tragedy had been spurned by Sir William Butler. The Acting High Commissioner, however, had given a technical reason: that the appeal had been made public before presentation. Taught to avoid this diplomatic impropriety, the organisers renewed their efforts. They drew up and circulated a more powerful document. At first signatures came slowly. But towards the end of February, as we have noticed, the policeman who killed Edgar was not only acquitted but extolled by the judge as an example to all "Zarps". That did it. Sharp was the effect upon the peculiar composition of British human nature. Politics overpowered business. Magnates and lesser money-seekers had been elated by the beginning of a long-delayed boom. Most of them had discouraged or shunned the new reform agitation lest politics might nip the boom. But now was at work that something which is stronger than money. Blood was up amongst the rank and file of the British Uitlanders. The petition, borne about all over the Rand, received within three or four weeks a host of signatures.

With more time there would have been still more signatures, but the closing and presentation of the petition were hastened by an episode in the House of Commons. The Colonial Minister replied on a miscellaneous debate ranging from Ceylon, Newfoundland and Trinidad to Johannesburg. Upon the latter subject, raised by the most strident of Conservative members, he dismissed with icy satire the suggestion of precipitate war with the Transvaal. No doubt the situation was bad and might lead to disaster. President Kruger, in spite of his conciliatory assurances when Johannesburg was disarmed after the Raid, had kept no promise and redressed no grievance. But he saw no new case for strong intervention.[1]

When a summary of this speech reached Johannesburg, the reformers decided to claim at once that a new case had arisen.

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxviii. col. 1380 (House of Commons, March 20, 1899).

They closed the petition when it carried the total of 21,684 signatures; many dubious as in all such collections, but the mass genuine. On March 24 the appeal to the Queen's Majesty was handed to the British agent in Pretoria, for transmission through the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State. This full, measured document may still be read with respect. Some sentences must be recalled.[1]

The great majority of the Uitlander population consists of British subjects. It was, and is, notorious that the Uitlanders have no share in the government of the country, although they constitute an absolute majority of the inhabitants of this State, possess a very large proportion of the land, and represent the intellect, wealth and energy of the State. . . .

The hostile attitude of the [Transvaal] Government towards Your Majesty's subjects has been accentuated by the building of forts not only around Pretoria but also overlooking Johannesburg. . . . The constitution and *personnel* of the police force is one of the standing menaces to the peace of Johannesburg. . . . Trial by jury exists in name but the jurors are selected exclusively from among the Burghers. . . .

The condition of Your Majesty's subjects in this State has indeed become well-nigh intolerable. . . . They are still deprived of all political rights, they are denied any voice in the Government of the country, they are taxed far above the requirements of the country. . . . The education of Uitlander children is made subject to impossible conditions. The police afford no adequate protection to the lives and property of the inhabitants of Johannesburg; they are rather a source of danger to the peace and safety of the Uitlander population. . . .

Wherefore your Majesty's humble petitioners humbly beseech . . . measures which will secure the speedy reform of the abuses complained of and to obtain substantial guarantees from the Government of this State for a recognition of their rights as British subjects.

This appeal reached the Colonial Office in mid-April. Chamberlain recognised at once that a "new case" had arisen indeed and in a stern aspect. It was a crux. The petition could not be accepted without raising the possibility of war with the Boers. It could not be rejected without disintegrating British loyalty

[1] C.9345, p. 185. See also *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. i. pp. 225-232.

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in South Africa by final loss of belief in the British Government. Meetings more crowded and earnest than ever before were in swing all along the Reef in support of the spirit of the Petition and especially of the five years' retrospective franchise. If this time the "Imperial factor" proved to mean merely Imperial futility, they never would trust it again. Already too many Uitlanders and others were asking: "What is the use of being a British subject?"

Hot for action was the High Commissioner:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

April 4, 1899.— . . . I remember when I landed in Cape Town in the middle of February, the first thing I heard on all hands was: "Well, you will have no trouble with Johannesburg for some time. The boom has killed politics." As a matter of fact it would be truer to say now that politics have killed the boom. . . . My own conviction is, and it is entirely the result of my experience in South Africa, that the Boer oligarchy will never agree to any reform at all worthy the name except under direct pressure from Her Majesty's Government. . . . Excited persons are constantly telling me, with reference to the possible intervention by H.M. Government, that it is a case of "now or never". . . . I fail to see, so far as the local situation is concerned, what is ever going to make it easier for us than it is to-day to tell the Transvaal Government that it must reform, and to offer to act as mediators between it and its discontented subjects with the full determination not to allow such proffered mediation to be refused.

It was easy for Milner to stress these representations. Far more difficult was the Colonial Secretary's personal position. He had to reckon with the Cabinet, the House of Commons and the country. Alternatives in South Africa were as plain to him as to a High Commissioner whom he was resolved not to disavow. But he needed all his wariness as well as his steel. It was he who would have to bear the political brunt at home should issues with the Transvaal come to the worst. He held the Uitlanders' case to be just. It must be taken up. Method was another matter. British opinion was not nearly so ripe for an ultimatum as the far-away High Commissioner assumed. "We assimilate nothing but what we are prepared for," says the sage.

All the rousing work at home had yet to be done. No less than before, Chamberlain desired to mingle pressure with persuasion and to bring about reform without war. The Cabinet, divided in feeling, was on the whole reluctant; rather alienated than persuaded by Milner's urging.

These days weighed nearly as much on Chamberlain as any afterwards. With his usual care in framing papers and speeches he prepared a draft reply to the petitioners. Towards the end of April it was circulated amongst Ministers and with it his memorandum for the Cabinet:

CHAMBERLAIN AND THE UITLANDERS' PETITION

April 28, 1899. [The Cabinet was to meet on Tuesday, May 2.]—If we ignore altogether the prayer of the petitioners it is certain that British influence in South Africa will be severely shaken. If we send an ultimatum to Kruger, it is possible, and in my opinion probable, that we shall get an offensive reply, and we shall have then to go to war, or to accept a humiliating check. . . . I enclose the draft of a despatch intended as a protest and still more as an appeal to public opinion. I have endeavoured to avoid anything in the nature of a definite threat which would commit us to ulterior action. . . .

The draft thus submitted recognised point by point the force of the chief complaints set out in the petition; reviewed the disappointing course of Transvaal policy since the promises of amelioration after the Raid; and in quiet though incisive language stated the earnest hope that President Kruger's Government would voluntarily abate grievances which the Queen's Government could no longer ignore. Scrupulously avoided was the tone of an ultimatum. None the less, the Cabinet uneasily recognised, as Chamberlain warned them in his memorandum, that the dread alternative might result. This "friendly remonstrance" once made would preclude retreat or quiescence. Arthur Balfour, on behalf of those, no doubt including Salisbury himself, whom we may call the uncomfortable Ministers, was the most acute critic of the Milner position. But Balfour could not suggest any practical alternative to the Colonial Secretary's procedure and disclaimed any desire to insist.

The issue was adjourned for a week.

VIII

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Chamberlain in his way was bent now on making sure of that one factor in the whole controversy which would dominate at need—the force of British opinion. Above all, if the nation were to be awakened to what was now at stake in South Africa, the High Commissioner's own mind, as uttered in his secret communications for over a month past, would have to be made known. Milner had already written to his closest friend in the Colonial department:

April 5, 1899.— . . . I am afraid to put too much vitriol into public despatches, lest they should ever see the light of day. And my secret despatches, which have all the stuff in them, are I suppose from the nature of the case unproducible even in part.

P.S.—Don't be afraid of publishing anything lest it should annoy the Transvaal and the Afrikanders. They are already *furious* with you. But on the other hand, if we never mean, not only *now* but at any future time, to do anything, it is useless to call general attention to our impotence by barking. Of course, I always assume that the time will and must come. Otherwise life would be unbearable.[1]

Just after this letter reached London, the Colonial Secretary acted on its spirit. At his express wish Lord Selborne cabled to the High Commissioner:

Mr. Chamberlain wishes you to send fully your views expressed as frankly as you consider it to be possible or advisable consistently with your position in South Africa. If you can possibly do this by telegraph please do. . . .

Understand these are nothing but suggestions and that your personal discretion as to what you can wisely and advantageously write for the purpose indicated is unfettered.[2]

As might have been expected from Milner's fires of conviction, the response to this encouragement was volcanic and devastating.

In a few days, Milner finished and cabled the document afterwards hymned on the one side and execrated on the other

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 348 (Milner to Selborne).

[2] Selborne's telegram to Milner, April 28, 1899.

—the "Helot" dispatch. Official style it threw to the winds or the whirlwinds. Unexpectedly, the intended publication by the Colonial Office was delayed for weeks. When made known, those who deplored described it as perfervid journalism; Asquith counted the adjectives. This is wide of the mark. Milner was invited virtually to address Parliament and the country through the written word. After fourteen months of constraint he let himself go. His whole pent-up soul and charged intellect went into an exposition and an incitement which reads still as living and sweeping oratory just as though it had been declaimed. To this day it seems to raise the temperature of the old blue-book where ultimately it appeared.[1] Somehow when Milner spoke he never could release his real temperament as when, in these days, he delivered himself with a pen in his hand. When "No. 78" was published, after the unforeseen delays, whether we liked it or loathed it we all "jumped"—to recall the word with which Briand once excited the French Chamber. The controversy can never be settled. A document of a different order—a masterpiece of under-statement in the judicial style of the late Lord Grey of Fallodon—might possibly have been as powerful and more widely persuasive. Many Conservatives were dubious or repelled. But, on the whole, it is improbable that any less daring and impassioned burst of outspokenness could have stirred in the same way the bulk of the British people.

Not even this answer to Chamberlain's invitation can be quoted amply here. But some passages that once resounded so near still "sound like a distant torrent's roar".

The relations between the British Colonies and the two Republics are intimate to a degree which one must live in South Africa in order fully to realise. Socially, economically, ethnologically, they are all one country; the two principal white races are everywhere inextricably mixed up; it is absurd for either to dream of subjugating the other. The only condition on which they can live in harmony and the country progress, is equality all round. South Africa can prosper under two, three or six Governments, though the fewer the better, but not under two absolutely conflicting social and political systems, perfect equality for Dutch and British in the British Colonies, side by side with permanent subjection

[1] Blue Book, June 1899, C.9345, No. 78, pp. 209-212.

BOOK XIV. 1899.

of British to Dutch in one of the Republics. It is idle to talk of peace and unity in such a state of affairs. . . . The case for intervention is overwhelming. . . .

The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots . . . does steadily undermine the influence and reputation of Great Britain and the respect for the British Government within the Queen's Dominions. A certain section of the press, not in the Transvaal only, preaches openly and constantly the doctrine of a Republic embracing all South Africa, and supports it by menacing references to the armaments of the Transvaal, its alliance with the Orange Free State, and the active sympathy which, in case of war, it would receive from a section of Her Majesty's subjects. I regret to say that this doctrine, supported as it is by a ceaseless stream of malignant lies about the intentions of the British Government, is producing a great effect upon a large number of our Dutch fellow-colonists. . . .

I can see nothing which will put a stop to this mischievous propaganda but some striking proof of the intention of Her Majesty's Government not to be ousted from its position in South Africa.[1]

The salient phrase was—"The case for intervention is overwhelming."

Milner's philippic was more than Chamberlain had looked for. It reached him on Friday morning, May 5. One immediate effect it had. Circulated at once to Ministers, it aided the Colonial Secretary to carry the Cabinet Council on the following Tuesday (May 9). His answer to the Uitlanders was authorised, and was dated next day. It was the beginning of a new policy—solid resolve with steady method. Chamberlain's dispatch was a comprehensive and drastic indictment of the Transvaal system but studiously cool in terms. To a paragraph unchanged from the first draft, the Cabinet made no demur. We must mark it.

They [the British Government] are most unwilling to depart from their attitude of reserve and expectancy, but having regard to the position of Great Britain as the Paramount Power in South Africa, and the duty incumbent upon them to protect all British subjects residing in a foreign country, they cannot permanently ignore the exceptional and arbitrary treatment to which their fellow countrymen and others are

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 349-353.

exposed, and the absolute indifference of the Government of the Republic to the friendly representations which have been made to them on the subject.[1]

In this wise, Her Majesty's Ministers accepted the Uitlanders appeal as well-founded. Yet the Colonial Secretary's dispatch came to a placable conclusion.

IX

The whole Unionist Cabinet was anxious to discover or make loopholes for conciliation. Chamberlain hoped especially that the Bond Ministry at the Cape, for the sake of all South Africa, would exert its utmost influence to alleviate the Kruger regime.

Too late the anxious Cabinet had been brought round to an almost lively opinion, that the characteristic "Birmingham Plan"—never appreciated till now—of full municipal rights for the Rand, was the only solution compatible with peace, with the petition, and with Boer independence. Chamberlain had never swerved from that idea. Now as before he held two doors open. Just at the end of his long dispatch he suggested a meeting at Pretoria between the Boer president and the High Commissioner. We must see how this happened.

At the last moment came one of those curious turns of circumstance which derive often from contrary human designs and deceive them all. The Colonial Secretary received a remarkable telegram from the High Commissioner.

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

May 8, 1899.—I believe the Government of S.A.R. are in such a tight place that they would concede a great deal if assured that such concession would buy off our hostility. . . . On the other hand if we can only get into negotiations with them we can compel them either to accept specific reforms, or else, by refusing them, to show their invincible obstinacy and justify us in taking stronger measures. And I think if we propose negotiations I can put the screw on their Cape friends to urge them to accept it, and failing such acceptance to wash their hands of them.

[1] C.9345, pp. 226-231 (Chamberlain to High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, May 10).

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To Chamberlain's practical temper as a negotiator no suggestion could have been more welcome or timely. It arrived on the eve of the Cabinet which authorised the momentous dispatch in its final form. That document then contained as an addendum the entirely new proposal of a meeting between Kruger and Milner:

> With the earnest hope of arriving at a satisfactory settlement, and as a proof of their desire to maintain cordial relations with the South African Republic, Her Majesty's Government now suggest for the consideration of President Kruger, that a meeting should be arranged between his Honour and yourself [the High Commissioner] for the purpose of discussing the situation in a conciliatory spirit . . . If the President should be disposed favourably to entertain this suggestion you are authorised to proceed to Pretoria to confer with him on all the questions raised in this despatch.[1]

The Unionist Cabinet rejoiced sedately in this relief. No one has denied from that day to this that the spirit and terms of Chamberlain's proposition for direct conference with the Transvaal were at this stage the proofs of his goodwill, however firm his underlying temper. In less than five months since a working man was killed in "Florrie's Buildings", the South African situation had been totally transformed, and danger was now the essence of it. "What is the use of being a British subject?" To that question in South Africa a positive answer was returned. The appeal to the Crown was pronounced by the Secretary of State justly founded. In principle, the right and duty of Imperial intervention were declared.

But, as for more than a year past, since the Colonial Secretary overruled the High Commissioner's first desire to "work up to a crisis", he meant to exhaust the means of peace. He had hoped after the Raid that he himself would be the English statesman to meet Kruger face to face. Since his expectation of a visit by the Boer President to London had been disappointed, he always wished that he could have gone to South Africa for the purpose. Shortly after Milner's appointment he desired, as a preceding chapter of this book has narrated, an early meeting between the young High Commissioner and the "Old Man" of the Transvaal.

[1] May 10, 1899; C.9345, p. 231.

Now, Milner's latest message encouraged him to assume—and the whole Unionist Government was of the same mind—that conversations at Pretoria might bring about a tolerable adjustment and could not worsen the situation. It did not, and it could not, enter Chamberlain's head that the idea of conference might be so turned as to become deadly to peace. Wheels within wheels were working in South African politics.

CHAPTER LXV

BLOEMFONTEIN AND AFTER—THE REAL CHAMBERLAIN

(1899)

AFRIKANDER Moves—Warnings to Kruger—The Conference Project—A Change of Venue—Not Pretoria but Bloemfontein—Chamberlain's Purpose Crossed—Dark Signs—Milner and Kruger Face to Face—The Five Days—Milner breaks off—Chamberlain Disapproves—A Perilous Situation—Ultimatum or Not?—Further Patience—British Public Opinion—The Decisive Factor—A Master of Management—"We have put our Hands to the Plough"—A Great Hope in July—Chamberlain's Optimism and Milner's Dismay—The Situation restored—Are Kruger's Concessions Real?—Chamberlain's Proposals for Final Settlement: Joint Enquiry and Further Conference—A Great Debate—"Peace with Reform".

I

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CHAMAERLAIN had authorised the High Commissioner "to proceed to Pretoria". This would have been the bolder course, and might have been the more fortunate. Hofmeyr, always a prime-mover, though in the background, had arranged another venue. A formal invitation to Bloemfontein came from Kruger's ally, President Steyn. The whole Cape Ministry regarded the pleasant little capital of the Orange Free State as the best rendezvous.

The Colonial Secretary's idea of a meeting between Kruger and Milner contemplated something more informal and less committing than a Conference. At once the High Commissioner himself felt the danger that the other edge of an idea might be turned against him. Chamberlain with a lifelong experience in every kind of debate and negotiation, sees all the hazards and in a telegram states them with his terse discrimination:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

May 12.—I am inclined to regret proposal as placing us in some difficulty. In view of momentous consequences of an actual breach with Transvaal, public opinion will expect us to make every effort to avoid it, and will not appreciate technical objections or points of etiquette.

Personally I doubt if satisfactory result will follow proposed interview and failure to agree may end in moral support of Orange Free State and Cape being given to Kruger.

I would have preferred to get our statement of the case published before proposal for interview. If present negotiation continues or Conference is arranged you will have to withhold despatch,[1] otherwise Kruger might withdraw on pretence that tone was objectionable.

We shall be obliged to exhaust this new line before exerting pressure in any other way.

More formally the Colonial Secretary cabled that while "for many reasons" either Capetown or Pretoria would have been better ground for a meeting, the High Commissioner might accept Steyn's proposal of his own capital.

The Conference was arranged to open on the last day of May. While there was yet time, more than one leading Afrikander pressed in secret—unfortunately only in secret—for just such concessions as Milner was about to urge. De Villiers with deep anxiety made a memorable confession and entreaty. In good faith he had laboured to persuade Gladstone's Government after Majuba to restore the Transvaal but now he said:

I am quite certain that if in 1881 it had been known to my fellow-Commissioners that the President would adopt his retrogressive policy, neither President Brand nor I would ever have induced them to consent to sign the Convention. They would have advised the Secretary of State to let matters revert to the condition in which they were before peace was concluded; in other words to recommence the war. [It was suggested to me by Sir Evelyn Wood that the Transvaal might show its hatred of the Britisher by subsequently making the franchise almost prohibitive, but I indignantly scouted the idea. He reminded me of the remark the year before last, and I felt that I had been in the wrong.] . . . If the five

[1] This is Chamberlain's dispatch of May 10, in reply to the Uitlanders' Petition.

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years' term were offered by the Transvaal, with a retrospective operation, the Uitlanders would be bound to take it subject to the restrictions. I fear there would always still be a danger of the Volksraad revoking the gift before it had come into operation. . . .[1]

Merriman wrote a few days later:

President Kruger should reflect that nine out of ten people that receive the franchise will be supporters of the Republic in which they will have an interest. . . . The only effect of a dogged refusal will be to set both Chamberlain and Rhodes on their legs again as far as regards South African affairs; which would be a calamity. . . .[2]

These are such appeals as apprehend the denial they dread. Of no better purport, on the eve, was confidential British news from Pretoria itself and the Reef and Natal. Johannesburg thought the Conference a "trap", and feared as usual the weakness of Her Majesty's Ministers, including the Colonial Secretary. The temper of the burghers was reported dour and militant—leaders of "the Young Afrikander war-party" breathing defiance. One member of the Volksraad, a doughty die-hard, Nys by name, exclaims: "The burghers won't stand any concessions and neither will we in the Raad. It is the general feeling in the Raad that there will be war: we are ready for it."[3]

II

The High Commissioner cabled home: "I feel that, without asking for elaborate instructions, I need some indication of line you wish me to take at Conference".[4] The Secretary of State answered in the spirit of his administration, which looked for likely men and gave them scope. But this time while refusing to fetter his lieutenant he gave the wisest advice:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

May 24, 1899.—It is not my intention to give you any formal instructions for Conference; I wish to leave you as free a hand as possible. I

[1] Correspondence found at Bloemfontein (De Villiers to Steyn, May 21, 1899). Cd. 369, No. 1. The passage in brackets is omitted in the published Blue Book. It is here quoted from the Chamberlain papers.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 9 (Merriman to Fischer, Bloemfontein, May 26, 1899).

[3] Chamberlain Papers. Various reports from the Transvaal and Natal.

[4] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 398 (Milner to Chamberlain, May 22, 1899).

think personally that you should lay all the stress on the question of franchise in first instance. Other reforms are less pressing and will come in time, if this can be arranged satisfactorily and form of oath modified. Redistribution is reasonable and important, but you might accept a moderate concession. If fair terms on franchise are refused by President, it appears hardly worth while to bring forward other matters, such as aliens, coloured people, education, dynamite, etc., at the Conference, and the whole situation must be reconsidered.

You should not, however, lose sight of possible alternative in shape of full municipal rights for populous mining district and Johannesburg. This I still think a feasible solution, if President fears that independence will be endangered by concession of general franchise. I had prepared preceding instructions before arrival of your telegram of 22nd May. Our views, you will see, are substantially the same and details are left to your discretion.[1]

The only express restriction Chamberlain imposed on Milner in the private telegrams at this moment was that the "delicate subject of arbitration" between Britain and the Transvaal must not be introduced "without further communication with me". Preconceived prejudice, usually impervious to evidence, will not in this case find it easy to show how the tenor of Chamberlain's counsel for the conduct of the Bloemfontein Conference could have been improved.

Nor did he stop there in his desire to encourage any influence which might make for reform with peace. The Cape Premier wished to take part at Bloemfontein. Milner feared that Schreiner, Steyn and Kruger would work more or less together for some colourable delusion. The Colonial Secretary was emphatically in favour of including the Cape Premier:

May 26, 1899.—*To Milner.*—If I were in your place I should let Mr. Schreiner come. He wants peace and will try for a settlement. . . . If he is not allowed to go, and the Conference breaks down, he is pretty sure to think or to say he could have saved the situation and he will attribute failure to your or my obstinacy. . . .

But having expressed my own views I am ready to leave decision with you as you are on the spot. Bear in mind, however, that the attitude

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 399.

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of Cape Prime Minister will have a most important influence on the ultimate decision of Her Majesty's Government.

The discretion thus left to him Milner used to reject this shrewd judgment. He thought it absurd that in seeking justice for the British in the Transvaal he should be hampered by a Premier representing the Dutch at the Cape. Schreiner did not participate.

To the Colonial Office through Lord Selborne, the High Commissioner sends a sombre letter. Though he still means to work for the best, in his heart he expects a breakdown and stresses the necessity of military preparation. At the eleventh hour the Boers will yield to the concrete argument:

MILNER TO SELBORNE

May 24. [*Very secret*].— . . . I am not hopeful of the result of the Conference. Of course I shall do my very utmost to get *any* settlement which has the possibility of improvement in it. But I gather that the fighting section of the Boers is very intractable. The signs are all worse during the last few days. It is true the Free State, and the Colonial Afrikander, are thoroughly frightened and will do what they can, short of siding openly against the S.A.R. (for which they lack the moral courage) to get Kruger to give way. Still it is more than doubtful whether he will. One thing is quite certain. If we can't get reforms now by negotiation, with so much in our favour, we shall never get them, and we must either be prepared to see Kruger carry out his policy of suppressing his English subjects, or compel him to desist from it. The latter means a greatly increased force and *may* mean war.

The question has, therefore, got into a stage, when its *military aspect* is becoming of supreme importance. When this reaches you, unless the Conference has in the meantime wholly altered the situation, the strain will be near breaking point. If it does come to a tussle the next few months—winter—are better for us than the last two months of the year and beginning of next—summer. . . . My view has been and still is, in spite of all these alarms and excursions, that if we are perfectly determined we shall win without a fight or with a mere apology for one. It is a long period of suspense, or of enforced standing on the defensive which might lead to the big war. . . .[1]

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 400-401.

On the very day before this inauspicious meeting, our vice-consul at Johannesburg reported, in terms literally prophetic, the feeling of both sides in the Transvaal: "Most people think Conference will come to an untimely end and trouble will ensue".

III

The Bloemfontein Conference opened on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 31, and collapsed on the following Monday, June 5. The detail of that painful and baneful struggle does not belong to these pages. It lives of itself in the blue-book in a manner not to be equalled by epitome or description.[1]

"Two more opposite men than Kruger and Milner could scarcely be brought together", said Merriman. It seems strictly impossible to imagine a more extreme contrast either of physical or mental types. Milner, the high-wrought clenched intellectual, felt himself the representative of a great empire in the cause of its honour, right and safety. With all his punctilious urbanity of bearing, he had soldierly blood in his veins, and a combustible look came readily into his eye at a hint of antagonism. Against that great empire in whose name Kruger was addressed, the massive old warrior in a frock-coat was ready to stake a small people—small but of strong race, formidably equipped, locally possessed of every initial advantage, primed with confidence. With his heavy fringed face, Kruger looked like a palaeolithic man by comparison with the "fine flower" of Oxford.

The gist of what happened in the five days must now be given in a compressed paraphrase. We must see the course of proceedings somewhat as Chamberlain saw it. Milner reports concisely during the sittings. Even to telegrams his graphic gift adds a human touch or two.

First Day (*Wednesday, May* 31).—Proceedings are "very slow". The old gentleman "rambles fearfully". He insists that votes for newcomers means swamping his burghers. Milner rejoins: "I do not want to swamp the old population but it is perfectly possible to give the new population an immediate voice . . . and yet to leave the old burghers in such a position that they cannot possibly be swamped".

[1] Correspondence relating to the Bloemfontein Conference, 1899, C.9404, pp. 14-39, 1899.

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Second Day (*Thursday, June* 1).—After some rival words on armaments—too little said perhaps about this—they came to close grips. The High Commissioner puts in his proposal for five years retrospective franchise with a small measure of redistribution leaving the old burghers in full control of the Volksraad. The President replies in effect that if the Uitlanders get a majority of the votes they will soon get a majority of the seats. It would be "worse than annexation". Repeatedly through the day he protests on behalf of "my independence". At one point Milner exclaims, "Don't let us talk about independence every minute. I assure the President that I don't want to touch his independence."—Much merriment amongst the British at the news that Flying Fox has won the Derby.[1]

Third Day (*Friday, June* 2).—The President springs a surprise. It is in the shape of "a complete Reform Bill, worked out in clauses and sub-clauses," which Milner "cannot but think he must have had in his pocket all the time". The High Commissioner telegraphs to Chamberlain in effect that the scheme is for a nominal seven years' franchise, not retrospective, surrounded by what would be called in our day, barbed-wire restrictions. Not only is the scheme gravely inadequate in itself. The President makes it dependent absolutely upon reference of all future disputes to arbitration. Milner hoped—as Chamberlain long had held—that some impartial tribunal might be devised. But he stated the fundamental principle of British policy. Foreign interference or participation could not be accepted in any shape or form.—The High Commissioner, seeing no hope now of a settlement by franchise reform, put forward Chamberlain's alternative solution, local government for the Rand. The President waved this away with horror. He felt that it meant giving up his keys. Had he been of a classical mind he would have called it bringing in the Wooden Horse.

Fourth Day (*Saturday, June* 3).—Milner puts in the memorandum he had sat up all night to frame. He shows that the President's nominal franchise-scheme is so largely nullified by restrictions that it does not offer any real approach to a basis of settlement. Feeling is now very tense but restrained. The President says, "If I were to go further I should be giving my land away". He does not mean to go further. After

[1] The Duke of Westminster's horse. The telegram was addressed to "Bendor", the present Duke, who as Lord Belgrave was then on Milner's staff.

the sitting on Saturday morning the Conference is adjourned until Monday.

Interval (*Sunday, June* 4).—The High Commissioner telegraphs to the Colonial Secretary that the Conference seems likely to fail. The President will not listen to any idea of extended powers of local government. His franchise proposals would not materially alter for some years the Uitlanders' position. "I have been studiously conciliatory."

Fifth and Last Day (*Monday, June* 5).—Rival memoranda are read. The High Commissioner states that the President's proposals do not alleviate those grievances of the Uitlanders which the Imperial Government by its acceptance of the Petition is pledged to redress. Milner declines to link franchise with arbitration. These subjects must be discussed on their separate merits. Two sentences—though they did not occur in connection—express the meaning of the day:

His Honour: "I am not ready to hand over my country to strangers".

His Excellency: "This Conference is absolutely at an end, and there is no obligation on either side arising out of it".

Another detail never can be forgotten nor remembered without respect. Towards the end of this prologue to tragedy the solemn-minded iron-hearted old man cried, "It is our country you want", and his head was bowed for a moment while tears were forced from his eyes. Whatever were his faults, it was for the separate life and law and freedom of his people, the highest cause for him as he saw it, that he was fated to stand. In that sense the hand of the Lord was upon him. He could not know that Chamberlain, whose sympathies since the Raid had never been with the capitalists, did not want his country; that the Unionist Government did not want his country; that by trying to keep both burgher liberty and domination over the gold-fields and their workers he would undo his country; and that large concessions to the community created by the mines were now the only means of preserving his country.

Milner and Kruger—like Chamberlain and Rhodes three weeks before—had seen the last of each other. "And going out quickly Steyn despatched a large order to Germany for Mausers and cartridges." [1]

[1] *Lord de Villiers and his Times* (p. 339), by Professor Eric A. Walker, who in his excellent biography takes this passage from Van der Merwe's *Steyn*, vol. i. p. 191.

IV

BOOK XIV. 1899.

The end came in this way to Chamberlain's disapproving astonishment. Upon the first warnings of collapse he minuted "This is a serious matter. It seems clear to me that Sir A. Milner has been overworked. Hence some natural depression." He little knew that the irrevocable had already happened.

Milner was using his free hand to break off. To do this without authorisation from home, considering what was at stake for the British Government and people, was beyond supposition. Earnestly the Colonial Secretary commanded further efforts for agreement, if possible, or at least for such a management of the British case as would put the Boer President "clearly in the wrong:"

> I hope you will not break off hastily. Boers do not understand quick decisions but prefer to waste a long time over a bargain without coming to terms. I am by no means convinced that the President of the South African Republic has made his last offer, and you should be very patient and admit a good deal of haggling before you finally abandon the game. It is of the utmost importance to put the President of the South African Republic clearly in the wrong.[1]

He went on to suggest the lines of further negotiation. Were five or even six years retrospective franchise conceded, non-foreign arbitration might be arranged perhaps through the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council with Afrikanders added to it like de Villiers. Provided the franchise struggle were satisfactorily settled Her Majesty's Government would make a further and signal concession. As regards Transvaal independence, they would willingly and favourably consider any formal assurance or guarantee likely to relieve the President's mind.

These counsels might have softened even Kruger's obdurate suspicion that Chamberlain "wanted his country". Had the message reached Bloemfontein in time it would have prolonged the Conference, and might have led to an adjournment without accentuated bitterness. But nothing suggests that Kruger could have been induced by any means to concede any franchise proposals that the British Government could accept as a sufficient answer to the Uitlanders' petition.

[1] Chamberlain to Milner, June 5 (sent very late that evening).

Speculation grasps at air because Chamberlain's instructions to hold on did not reach Bloemfontein until Tuesday morning, the day after the collapse.

Milner, loaded with work as never yet, though short of what was to come, cannot reply for over a week. Then he mails a very long letter:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

June 14, 1899.— . . . We have been at cross-purposes more than once during the past few weeks. This was inevitable owing to the drive and the impossibility of explaining so many changing aspects of a most complicated situation adequately by telegraph. But in so far as it may have been my fault I deeply regret it. . . .

. . . I think I was wrong in breaking off the Conference quite as quickly as I did. Perhaps extreme fatigue had something to do with it. But my main feeling was that we had got a clearish issue, whereas, if we went on and on, as the other party seemed inclined to do, we might get a little more and a little more, each new concession being *made to appear very big*, and finally feel unable after so many concessions to break off and yet find we had a perfectly hollow scheme. The determination not really to admit the Uitlander was too evident, and so was the readiness of the Orange Free State, or rather of its political directors—I am not so sure about the people—to accept Kruger's nickel as silver.

Of course I should not have broken off as I did had I had your telegram urging delay, in time. That came the next morning. . . .[1]

None the less the High Commissioner vigorously maintains that he has done the right thing; and adds an almost tragic optimism. He has tremendous backing from the British throughout South Africa. They are more united than they have been for twenty years. "Their confidence in *you* [Chamberlain] is profound." The Dutch are wavering. Schreiner may press Kruger to go further and perhaps the whole way. If it comes to war the Orange Free State will be lukewarm. There would be much shirking in the Transvaal itself. The letter goes on:

Though I think the beginning of a war would be *very unpleasant*, owing to our scattered outposts and the fact that the thinly peopled

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 423-424 (Milner to Chamberlain, June 14, 1899).

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centre of the country is quite Dutch, I do not think the result doubtful, or the ultimate difficulty, when once we had cleared the Augean stable, at all serious. . . .

The disarming frankness of this apologia settled the personal question. The Colonial Secretary answered in the first long private letter he had written to the High Commissioner for many a month. Every word of the following passage is worthy of the Chief who, as Milner himself once said to the present writer, "never let you down":

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

Colonial Office, July 7, 1899.—I am much obliged for your letter of the 14th June. I have also, of course, seen all your private letters to Selborne. I have not written to you myself lately both because I have been very much pressed and because matters move so quickly that the telegraph anticipates and alters all I have to say.

I think you will agree that, whatever trifling differences there may have been as to the points of procedure, we have given you a hearty and unflinching support. Your despatch of May 4 was no doubt very strong and the passage about the loyalty of the Cape Dutch has been severely criticised in the Opposition newspapers. Personally, I am all for speaking plainly in these matters. There comes a time when it is dangerous to attempt to be blind, and although in quiet years we like to speak of the universal loyalty of Her Majesty's subjects everywhere, we must be aware that where there is a mixed population race sympathy may be stronger than devotion to British rule. . . .

As I have constantly warned you, opinion here is strongly opposed to war although the necessity of resorting to war in the last resort is gradually making its way among all classes. If we were driven to this extremity I think the Government could rely upon the vast majority of its own supporters and a minority of the Opposition, but the bulk of the Opposition would probably take the opportunity to denounce us. I believe that to some extent we have been able to show that the question at issue is greater than any particular grievance or special act of oppression and that if we have to go further it will not be for the franchise, or Edgar or dynamite, but for the maintenance of our position in South Africa and the removal of the one great cause of race animosity in the country.

The newspaper telegrams all appear to indicate further concessions on the President's part. If these are really substantial it will be practically impossible for us to find a *casus belli* in minor differences. I am sure in this case our policy is to accept them for what they pretend to be, and if they fail of their object or prove subsequently to have been made in bad faith our case will be stronger than it has ever been. . . .

I heartily sympathise with you in all your anxieties and difficulties. . . . You may be sure that we are not without our troubles on this side.

Though the personal tone was staunch the underlying injunction of restraint could not have been pleasing to Milner. We shall find them soon again at inward variance. Partly because some differences in temperament and method were not incidental but fundamental. Partly because conditions in their far-divided spheres were as dissimilar. Upon public opinion at home and in the broad Empire all depended. That was the Colonial Secretary's affair. Upon him and no other lay the supreme responsibility.

V

By taking up the Uitlanders' Petition, the Unionist Cabinet was bound to secure substantial redress. Immediately after the breakdown of the Conference they contemplated an early ultimatum. They were inclined to demand repeal by the Transvaal of all legislation since 1884 restricting the rights and privileges enjoyed by Uitlanders when the London Convention was arranged.[1] On second thoughts Ministers as a whole were neither happy nor firm in this idea. To their surprise and relief Milner himself telegraphed that an immediate ultimatum would be premature, because there was still a chance that President Kruger might make full concession if sufficiently pressed.[2]

Cheered though mystified by this moderation, the Cabinet reverted to a patient mind. In a manner amusingly familiar to all who have been in touch with the very human working of Cabinets, Ministers were more annoyed than responsive when the High Commissioner again altered his view. They regarded him as a whirling piece in the kaleidoscope of things when

[1] Chamberlain to Milner, June 7.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 431 (Milner to Chamberlain, June 9).

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within another fortnight he telegraphed that the sternest of ultimatums might very soon be required.[1]

Lord Selborne on behalf of the Colonial Office gives the best psychological impression of these perplexing days in a candid remonstrance with the friend for whom he strove:

> *June* 25, 1899.—*Selborne to Milner.*— . . . The Cabinet shook their heads. "Milner is inconsistent. He says he does not want an ultimatum yesterday, to-day he says he does. He is getting jumpy. No wonder, he must be overdone." I need not tell you that I have not been silent and have explained these apparent contradictions away. . . .[2]

By this time, Chamberlain's dispatch of May 10 accepting on behalf of Her Majesty's Government the Uitlanders' Petition to the Queen was published at last; and likewise the blue-book containing Milner's burning advocacy of the case for the "Helots". It was the talk of the nation. Opinion was divided in the manner already depicted. The Cape Dutch were infuriated against the High Commissioner at a moment when between him and the Afrikander leaders negotiations of a kind were still going on. The leader of the Opposition gave the first signal that in case of war the Government could not count on his support. Chamberlain's private representations to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman were fruitless.[3]

The Colonial Secretary was blamed even by some of Milner's friends for what they called the premature publication of the philippic against Kruger's oppression. Now, the "Helots" dispatch was written for almost immediate publicity as we know, but because of the Bloemfontein Conference it had been already for six weeks withheld.

Meanwhile, what had been happening at Pretoria? President Kruger laid before the Volksraad the draft of a new franchise law embodying with some improvements his propositions at Bloemfontein. The draft purported to reduce the franchise period from fourteen years to seven. He declared that to give away more would give away independence. He did not want war, but at need the Lord who had watched over them in the past

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 444 (Milner to Chamberlain, June 22).
[2] *Ibid.* p. 446.
[3] J. A. Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. i. pp. 230-237.

would be their stay. The Uitlanders insist that the restrictions make a mockery of the Bill. The Colonial Secretary urges that the Cape Premier should press Kruger to improve the Bill. The High Commissioner for his part has no faith in Afrikander mediation nor in anything but a British ultimatum. It would bring all waverers to the British side. "The most probable result would be a complete climb-down on part of S.A.R. and if not that a war, which, however deplorable in itself, would at least enable us to put things on a sound basis for the future better than even the best-devised Convention can."[1] With accentuated optimism this is but a new version of Milner's old thesis, "Reform or War". It was easier to repeat it on paper than for statesmen to grapple with it amidst the democratic divisions of the Mother Country.

VI

Thus the controversy worked back to the question of Chamberlain's personality and management. Did he retain his old powers of command in the country? If so when and how would he exert them?

By comparison with British excitement in South Africa British feeling at home was not in marching order. Fervent Imperialists, convinced that it would and must come to war with the Boers, and so the sooner the better, were in a minority though strong. Many Conservatives as well as Liberals were puzzled and checked by the new complications and subtleties of the franchise controversy. To them the difference between a five years' franchise and a seven years' seemed little more than the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. What was this to make a war of? Few grasped what was the real alternative raised by the network of restrictions and precautions devised at Pretoria. The choice lay between prolonged exclusion of all but a modicum of the Uitlanders and immediate admission of the larger number.

The Colonial Secretary's discriminating eye—in these matters the most experienced of all eyes—saw well that public opinion would require masterly handling. The contrast between his sinewy gradualness and Milner's ardent chafing would have to continue for some time.

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 444 (Milner to Chamberlain, June 22).

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Psychologically, there is perhaps no more interesting study in Chamberlain's career. He desired peace if possible. But there must be some wide redress in the Transvaal. In case of war he would have to bear the brunt of the political storm. He would be hated as even he had not been hated. It behoved him to make no slip such as might be his political undoing. He made none.

By arrangement made long before he was engaged to address the annual Liberal Unionist gathering in Birmingham Town Hall. The occasion was fixed for a date three weeks after the Bloemfontein break-up. To Milner and his near friends the time seemed long. When the Birmingham meeting was near, Lord Selborne, second in command at the Colonial Office, made an extreme personal appeal to its chief. If the Government continued to seem weak and dilatory, Milner and perhaps others would resign. We would avert war by facing it, but bring it by fumbling. The Opposition would try to give the Colonial Secretary a heavy throw whatever he did. Surely it was time to tell the country that British predominance was at stake in South Africa and to convince Kruger "that the Cabinet mean business this time, once and for all".[1]

Chamberlain's answer was one of the few letters of his that show all the man in his nerve and circumspection when he had perilous business on hand. No one alive could give him lessons in either of two things—courage of purpose and skill in approach.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SELBORNE

June 23, 1899.—Many thanks. My speech was finally settled—subject to possible telegrams—before I got your letter. I think it will fairly meet your wishes.

The difficulty—which only presents itself in full force to those who are actually responsible—is not so much to make up one's own mind as to keep perfect faith with one's colleagues and friends.

I have no idea that in this case they will differ from me, but the more loyal they are the more I am bound not to commit them further than they have agreed to go.

I don't care a twopenny damn for office, or for the temporary gusts of public opinion.

In any course there is risk, as Mr. Kruger is a very uncertain factor,

[1] Selborne to Chamberlain, June 23, 1899.



Photo *H N King*

THE COLONIAL OFFICE—THE WELL-REMEMBERED ROOM

but I hope to get my way in the long run, and, provided that we do not recede an inch, we may be satisfied now and then to dawdle.

There is no doubt that opinion in the House of Commons is fluid, and on the whole, I think, bad. Perhaps they will rise to my fly—perhaps they won't.

I want to get the water into good condition; and to do everything *selon les règles*. Then if I fail, "*Victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catoni*"—Yours ever, CATO.

None the less he thinks as on some occasions before, but this time a little grimly, that the High Commissioner is remote from appreciation of political difficulties at home. For all the staunch defence he has framed, he minutes with regard to its subject: "Milner is really rather trying. . . . I shall do my best for Milner, and for the policy which is mine as well as his, to-morrow—but he is overstrained".

On the night[1] the Town Hall was crammed in the Birmingham spirit. Large numbers were turned away. The crowd within would have been doubled or more had space allowed. Listeners who often had heard him thought the speech one of the finest they had known—"sober, earnest, clear", said his wife. It earned those words. As so often before in the same scene he excelled in the steady marshalling of his case and carried his audience with him by the compacted sentences and their consecutive march. He showed how the reconciling intentions of Gladstone's Government in 1881 and 1884 had been frustrated; how since then the spirit of the London Convention, so far as it meant to provide for the equal rights of non-Boer inhabitants and new settlers, had been violated and reversed. We had been four times on the verge of war with the Transvaal:

Whatever we may think of the original policy, we must admit that its results have disappointed the hopes of all those who were the prominent advocates of its adoption. . . . All the grievances of the Outlanders, of which you hear so much, date from the second Convention of 1884. . . . In 1881 when the Convention was being discussed, President Kruger was asked by our representatives what treatment would be given to British subjects in the Transvaal. He said, "All strangers have now and will always have equal rights and privileges with the burghers of

[1] Monday, June 26, 1899.

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the Transvaal," and yet . . . the majority of the population of the Transvaal, which consists of these same strangers chiefly British subjects, have no representation, although they have made the prosperity of the State, and although they pay five-sixths of the revenue.

He upheld the High Commissioner:

We selected Sir Alfred Milner. We sent him out because we believed that he was the best man to deal with this difficult situation, and now that he is there in the midst of intrigue and hatred we intend to support him. . . . I am abused—for what, ye gods should I not be abused!— . . . because I published his despatch which was sent to me for publication. What would have been said if I had withheld it?

The concluding passages meant that there would be no flaunting but no flinching.

Those who say that there is a party within the Government that desires war are guilty of a mischievous untruth. On the other hand, those fall into a grievous error who think that there is a party within the Government who having put their hands to the plough will now draw back. . . . We will not be hurried on the one hand; we will not be held back on the other. But having undertaken this business we will see it through.

Telling again were his few words in reply to the vote of thanks:

I have spoken to you from my heart to-night. I believe that we have reached a critical, and a turning, point in the history of the Empire. I think our Colonies, and, indeed, I might almost say the nations of the world, are watching us in a difficulty which may well try the temper and character of our people—watching to see how we shall emerge from it.

Always in crisis Chamberlain stamped a phrase or two upon the popular mind. Now, we had "put our hands to the plough", and "having undertaken this business we will see it through". This speech went far to convince the majority of the country—still desiring peace with reform like Chamberlain himself—that war might have to be waged. The overseas empire was widely stirred; the ideal of racial equality appealed straight to Canada and Australia. In Her Majesty's own hand came his commendation: "The Queen greatly admires Mr. Chamberlain's

speech". Queen Victoria had commanded Miss Phipps, her reader, to read it out to her and had listened to every word of it with the closest attention. George Wyndham wrote off, a few days later: "Things are going very well here. Chamberlain's speech has done wonders. Lord Lansdowne and Ritchie both told me they thought it excellent, and on the slow-thinking mass of M.P.'s the effect has been beyond hope. They wanted a lead and now having got one they are prepared to follow." The effect on the Cabinet was not much less. Rumours of dissension between the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary had been exploited as usual. False enough—at least for all operative purposes—the rumours filled the Opposition press and prompted its caricatures.

VII

Chamberlain's was the steering hand. There was yet no straight course ahead, nor clearness to right or left. Nor could there be any turning about. His political enemies, and no man could have more, had waited thirteen long years for him to come to grief somehow. Not since 1886 had they been so expectant. Surely now he must be ruined or discredited. Running either on the reefs or the shoals he must be broken or stranded. Alas, he was as hard as ever to beat. The very genuineness of his desire for peace with effectual reform saved him from any touch of passionate rashness. As we shall find, he was only imprudent in hope, not in anger.

Hofmeyr no more liked Kruger than Chamberlain liked Rhodes, but he and other Afrikander leaders pursued their efforts to persuade Pretoria. There came a moment when the Colonial Secretary's sanguine goodwill assumed that these just representations had been crowned with success and that war was banished.

One of his telegrams in these days to the High Commissioner must be singled out. Nothing better expresses in a few words the whole spirit of his policy—"exhausting moral pressure before proceeding to extremities".

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

July 3.—I incline to wait result of Hofmeyr negotiations. If they afford any basis for settlement so much the better; if not I shall send

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another despatch pressing urgently for franchise as proposed by you or for full municipal rights of mining districts and indicating plainly that if satisfactory reply is not given an ultimatum will follow. This carries out the policy of exhausting moral pressure before proceeding to extremities which is demanded by public opinion here and absolutely necessary if more than party support is desired. . . .

Through the next fortnight of July—only three months before the war—Chamberlain thought more and more that Afrikander counsels were telling. Growing rumour extolled President Kruger's coming-on disposition. Schreiner declared in his haste, afterwards regretted, that every pretext for British interference in the internal affairs of the Transvaal had already been removed. A new Franchise Bill was brought in at Pretoria on July 13. Full of defects and reservations no doubt it was. The body of Uitlanders immediately admitted would be much too small. But Milner confessed that the new measure marked some real advance. Then the Volksraad itself showed signs of further progress. On July 18 it seemed to many that a wonder had happened. With only five dissentient votes an amendment was carried in the Raad conceding a retrospective qualification of seven years' residence instead of nine. Unless the principle were found to be contradicted by the details there would be no war in South Africa.

VIII

Suspicion seemed swept away when on the morning of that day, July 18, the Colonial Secretary read in *The Times* an exhilarating message. Its Pretoria correspondent stated that the Volksraad was about to pass the seven years' retrospective franchise "without vexatious restrictions". This forecast was confirmed in other newspapers.

To Chamberlain it seemed that the clouds had broken at last —that peace was assured. To call him happy would not be the word. He exulted. As may happen, alas, to all mortals, one of the most joyous days of his political life was amongst the most deluded. In this unwonted flush he felicitated the Prime Minister, congratulated the dismayed High Commissioner, and went further. He authorised the lobby correspondent of *The Times* to insert a brief paragraph which sped round the world. The

announcement ran: "Assuming the most recent telegrams from Pretoria to be true . . . the crisis in the relations between Great Britain and the Transvaal may be regarded as ended". To Milner he cabled in the same sense—but adding an instinctive "if". On that "if" the next controversy was to pivot:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

July 18.—If, as reported in the Press here, President S.A.R. has really given 7 years retroactive franchise and 5 seats, I congratulate you on great victory. No one would dream of fighting over two years in qualification period, and President S.A.R. will have been driven by successive steps to almost exact position taken by you. We ought to make most of this and accept it as basis of settlement. . . . If report of this new concession is confirmed I propose to send you despatch . . . concluding with suggestion for another Conference in Cape Town to arrange details so as to secure *bona-fide* representation, to consider project of tribunal of arbitration without any foreign element, and to discuss all remaining points of difference between the two governments. . . .[1]

The Prime Minister heartily congratulates him on what "is really a great diplomatic success," but adds that "above all it is necessary to guard against backsliding".[2]

One of the most disciplined of men by second nature, in the exercise first of business and then of politics, Chamberlain by original nature was warmly impulsive. For once, his suppressed temperament, in spite of a life-time's usual self-mastery, disclosed itself with extraordinary incaution. We cannot regret it. Without it something would have been lacking to our knowledge of the inmost man.

Why did the shining hope grow dim and disappear? The question is quite crucial for this biography. Hope vanished because Pretoria refused the inevitable British request for consultation to verify the reality of the concessions nominally made. The forecasts which had inspired his rejoicing said that "vexatious restrictions" were to be removed from the new electoral system in the Transvaal. False is the assertion that he went to war after all for tweedledum against tweedledee. Emphatically condemned as a *casus belli* by the Colonial Secretary himself was

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 468.
[2] Salisbury to Chamberlain, July 19, 1899.

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the narrow issue between a five years' and a seven years' franchise. It recalled Mr. Lowe's contention in a former day that a £10 standard was our constitutional palladium while a £7 qualification would spell democracy and ruin. Nothing is more certain than that Chamberlain himself would have accepted a seven years' franchise proved to be effectual; and that even he could not have carried the Cabinet or the country for rejecting that basis of settlement.

The "Political Note" suggested by Chamberlain in *The Times* of July 19 spread consternation right and left amongst the British in South Africa. For a week or more most of them regarded it as a political Majuba. In Johannesburg especially the Uitlanders were thrown into panic. Their Council implored the Colonial Office to stick to their "irreducible minimum"—the five years demand as formulated at Bloemfontein. Natives in the mines were naturally led by this attitude into whispering freely that the British Government shrank from facing the Boers. The British press in South Africa riddled the Seven Years Bill. There, speakers and journalists soon talked of nothing but gins and springes—"obstacles", "pitfalls", "traps", "snares", "absurdities" and "impossibilities".

The High Commissioner, almost despairing, felt that an abyss had suddenly opened between him and his Chief. He was not indeed amongst those who thought that the Colonial Secretary, pledged to drive the plough, had seized the first pretext to bolt from it. Sadly he said to a friend: "Of course England may give us away—probably will—not from cowardice but from simple ignorance of the situation. . . . Joe has stuck to me *magnificently*. If he throws me over after all, or, worse still, retreats under a garbled version of my advice to him, I shall know it is only because he could not help it."[1] Now desertion of a comrade never had occurred in Chamberlain's whole life, and never would. Milner cabled at once—and afterwards with increasing force—that the Transvaal Bill offered no security for what it seemed to give.

The Bill, as it stands, leaves it practically in the hands of the Government of the South African Republic to enfranchise or not enfranchise

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 473 (Milner to his friend Rendel, July 21, 1899).

the Uitlanders as it chooses. . . . And the worst of it is that should the Bill, through a literal interpretation of its complicated provisions, fail to secure the object at which it avowedly aims, no one will be able to protest against the result.[1]

IX

When he indulged in impulsive optimism the Colonial Secretary might well suppose himself shielded against fears of his weakness. Shielded by the declarations and implications of the Birmingham speech; by his repeated words to Milner that nothing but a sure settlement could be accepted; by his redoubtable record through his public career in the particular matter of seeing any struggle through. At least he had proved for good that he was not the Boer-eater, lusting for war, of continental and Radical legend.

Quickly he steadied the shaken ranks of the British in South Africa by a statement on July 20 in the House of Commons:

> They [Her Majesty's Government] observe, however, that the Volksraad have still retained a number of conditions which might be so interpreted as to preclude those otherwise qualified from acquiring the franchise and might therefore be used to take away with one hand what has been given with the other. . . . It would also be easy by subsequent legislation to alter the whole character of the concessions now made, but Her Majesty's Government feel assured that the President, having accepted the principle for which they have contended, will be prepared to reconsider any detail of his schemes which can be shewn to be a possible hindrance to the full accomplishment of the object in view, and that he will not allow them to be nullified or reduced in value by any subsequent alterations of the law or acts of administration.[2]

It had never entered Chamberlain's head that anything but a bilateral settlement could be a guarantee. He had never dreamed that the Boers would expect their new measure to be taken on trust. Even in the first glow of his belief that peace was won he had kept his head and guarded himself at all points. We have seen that when he sent his premature felicitations to the unhappy Milner, he had made everything dependent upon

[1] C.9518, p. 51 (Milner to Chamberlain, July 26).

[2] Hansard (House of Commons, July 20, 1899), Fourth Series, vol. lxxiv, cols. 1350-1351.

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another Conference, "to arrange details so as to secure *bona-fide* representation, to consider project of tribunal of arbitration without any foreign element, and to discuss all remaining points of difference between the two governments".

The more Chamberlain looked at the matter the more he was strengthened in his original proviso—that the reality of reform must be guaranteed by joint enquiry. The soundness and necessity of this position was argued by none so forcibly as by the most eminent of Afrikander jurists. Sir Henry de Villiers wrote privately to Bloemfontein: "Then there is the Franchise Bill which is so obscure that the State Attorney had to issue an explanatory memorandum to remove the obscurities. But surely a law should be clear enough to speak for itself, and no Government or Court of Law will be bound by the State Attorney's explanations. I do not know what these explanations are, but the very fact that they are required condemns the Bill."[1] There could be no more impartial and conclusive justification of the Colonial Secretary's next step.

X

It was now for Chamberlain to frame, and for the Cabinet to approve, a dispatch opening a new and very hazardous phase. Yet a phase still admitting and demanding a conciliatory spirit.

His new draft was submitted to all his colleagues with a special request for their comments. Its momentous tenor was apparent. Salisbury—again contrary to the myth—telegraphed from Walmer, "I quite approve of draft". The majority of Ministers thoroughly agreed. Henry Chaplin indeed sent from the country two letters of approval and "The Squire" added in his life-long way, "Great storms here. If it is general I'm afraid it will play the devil with the crops." The criticisms of three Ministers—Balfour, Hicks-Beach and Ritchie—were not sharp and were not pressed.

At the next Cabinet, Monday, July 24, the draft was passed with only one important emendation. This to the effect that the new Franchise Law should be investigated by British and Trans-

[1] Correspondence found at Bloemfontein, Cd. 369, 1900, p. 3 (Villiers to Fischer, July 31, 1899). Quoted from Chamberlain's copy, where this passage is marked.

vaal delegates sitting jointly, comparing notes, and reporting separately to their Governments. Thus, although entirely written and to some extent rewritten by Chamberlain, the dispatch represented the fullest possible example of collective responsibility. Contrary accounts are the perversion of history.[1]

Were there room in this book for long State papers, this communication of July 27 to Milner would be quoted for reasons of substance, form and consequence. Intended to advance British opinion, yet to keep two doors open for the President, it is a pattern of cogent expression, owing everything to clearness and arrangement. It observes that "in the South African Republic alone of all the States of South Africa the Government has deliberately placed one of the two white races in a position of political inferiority to the other". It asserts, apart from the Conventions, "the ordinary obligations of a civilised Power to protect its subjects in a foreign country against injustice". It recites tersely the assurances given by Mr. Kruger and others in 1881 and 1884, and the subsequent violations of letter and spirit. But the Volksraad has now agreed to a franchise measure which appears to be an advance on former concessions. The vote itself would be valueless without some voice in the Volksraad for the Uitlanders,—"without however giving them the proportion of representation to which their numbers, taken alone, might entitle them, and which the President objected would enable them immediately to swamp the influence of the old burghers". In the new Law a number of conditions might "be used to take away with one hand what has been given with the other". Her Majesty's Government trust that many of the conditions now retained may be revised and that the residential qualification may be further reduced.

Therefore, the dispatch makes two proposals:

(1) A Joint Enquiry by British and Boer delegations for the purpose of reaching a satisfactory agreement on the franchise;

(2) A subsequent personal Conference between President Kruger and the High Commissioner to discuss remaining issues.

[1] Even so able a writer as Professor Walker, in *Lord de Villiers and his Times*, p. 343, allows himself to be misled by the hostile chatter of the day when he writes of Chamberlain after the dating of his dispatch rising "next day in the Commons with his fellow-ministers sitting by him to watch him read his speech". No ground but Labouchere's gossip is known for this ridiculous fiction.

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Especially the establishment of a Tribunal of Arbitration, strictly excluding any foreign element, yet constituting a "judicial authority whose independence, impartiality and capacity would be beyond and above all suspicion" in future cases concerning the interpretation of the London Convention.[1]

XI

The chief debate of the session took place in both Houses on Friday, July 28. It was awaited with intense feeling. Most eagerly by those who expected the subtle satire or cryptic moderation of a pacific Prime Minister at the expense of a belligerent Colonial Minister. We know how foolish was this partisan hypothesis. Those who entertained it were confounded.

Salisbury's comments were more drastic than any yet heard from his chief colleague. The Convention had been used, he said, "to reduce the English to the condition almost of a conquered, certainly of a subjugated, race". He implied that if war came, the Republic would be annexed. "If it ever happens that the validity of these Conventions[2] is impeached, I believe they belong from that time entirely to history." The Prime Minister closed with Chamberlain's symbol, "We have put our hands to the plough . . ."[3]

The House of Commons, benches crowded below and galleries above, bore the aspect of a great sitting. The leader of the Opposition, Campbell-Bannerman, opened by admitting that the Uitlander grievances constituted "a constant source of danger to the peace and prosperity of all the States and colonies in South Africa". He hoped that the franchise qualification would be further reduced to less than seven years; but the difference between seven and five was nothing to fight about; patience

[1] C.9518 of 1899, p. 11 (Chamberlain to Alfred Milner).

[2] Note that by this significant plural—so often said to have been the invention of Chamberlain's "tactlessness"—Lord Salisbury asserts the validity of the "Preamble" of 1881, with its formal proclamation of suzerainty. This, needless to say, had been the thesis of the Government as a whole since the issue of suzerainty was first revived by Pretoria. Moreover, Lord Rosebery's Government had likewise maintained that the "preamble" of 1881 remained valid no less than the new "articles" of 1884. The declaration in that sense on July 2, 1894, has been quotod already on p. 135 above.

[3] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxv. cols. 661-664 (July 28, 1899).

might well obliterate even that difference; no excuse remained for war or for talk of war.

The Colonial Secretary's immediate reply traversed the whole case. Delivered throughout in his own terse clear-cut manner, it was nothing if not moderate. More moderate in word and inference than the Prime Minister's style in another place. "No one dreams of acquiring this country which we of our free will retroceded. No one has any wish whatever to interfere with the independence we have granted. . . . We desire to place it on a firm basis by turning discontented aliens into loyal fellow-citizens of the Dutch." But the present "humiliating inferiority" of British subjects in the Transvaal could not long remain unremedied without raising greater issues—the predominance of Great Britain in South Africa, the peace of South Africa. There was no trivial quarrel about a mere difference between a seven years' and a five years' franchise. That point was a quibble. The real matter to elucidate was whether the nominal Seven Years Bill did in fact give any kind of "immediate and substantial representation". There must be "some approach in practice" to "equality of condition between the two white races".

Without this the Transvaal will remain what it is at present—a source of unrest, disturbance and danger. Although the situation is an anxious one I am hopeful of the future. I am hopeful for two reasons. In the first place because . . . President Kruger has, I believe, come to the conclusion that the Government are in earnest and that they have the people behind them. I trust under these circumstances to his common-sense. I trust to his present knowledge that reforms are necessary and I hope we may be able to convince him in any further negotiations and communications that we do not seek to do him or his country any harm but rather to help him to maintain his position and his authority, whilst at the same time securing justice to all the inhabitants of the country. But I am hopeful for a second reason, and that is because I have an absolute conviction that the great mass of the people of this country are prepared to support us, if the necessity should arise, in any measures we may think it necessary to take to secure justice to the British subjects in the Transvaal, and the due observance of the promises and Conventions upon which the independence of the Transvaal has been founded.[1]

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxv. cols. 697-716 (July 28, 1899).

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Chamberlain had spoken for rather over an hour. Many Liberals as well as the Unionist majority felt, as one of his hearers said, that he had "broken the backbone of the attack".

Both the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary anticipated a peaceful solution. They had private reasons. All their information before the debate confirmed a telegram just received from the High Commissioner. It reported a growing opinion that Pretoria and its sympathisers "are still bluffing and will yield further if pressure is kept up."[1]

The German archives again throw their sidelights on the British situation. Some weeks earlier Count Hatzfeldt's impressions were that the majority of the Unionist Cabinet were against war but were overmastered by Chamberlain.

Now, after the debate, the ambassador telegraphs for the Kaiser's personal information a corrected view. Lord Salisbury's tone is intended to convince Kruger of Ministerial unity. If the Prime Minister's peaceable purposes are to succeed the Boers must make further concessions. Chamberlain is playing for time, but the Transvaal would be well advised to accept his proposal of joint enquiry. Sir Frank Lascelles—then on leave in London—has talked to all the influential people, and believes that the danger of hostilities has passed away.

At this Count Bülow is confirmed—like Holstein—in the opinion that it will not come to war. The City does not expect it: Consols are steady. But the Kaiser sticks to his own instinct. Luckier in his premonitions than in the Fashoda crisis, he thinks that war there will be; because to President Kruger, regarding himself as the head of an "independent State", Chamberlain's proposal of joint enquiry into the internal matter of the electorate must seem an offence and a danger. There is insight in these august annotations.[2]

But, just as Hatzfeldt reported, optimism prevailed in London at the end of July. It was thought hardly credible that the invitation to joint enquiry on the franchise question, and to renewed conference on all other questions, would be refused by the Transvaal; or that the primitive old die-hard bred on the

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 471 (Milner to Chamberlain, July 26, 1899).

[2] *Grosse Politik*, xv. pp. 378-380 (July 30 and 31).

veldt would throw himself against an Empire. The first Peace Conference at the Hague had just held its final sitting. Kruger had lately placed in France and Germany new and heavy orders for quick-firing guns and Krupp guns. But by now, the solid majority of the nation, as Chamberlain well knew, were undoubtedly behind a policy which they held both reasonable and resolute. His consummate management of time had succeeded where a premature offensive such as Milner's school desired would have failed. The British people in the main had come in their way to the conclusion that the South African dispute must be settled soon by agreement or by arms.

CHAPTER LXVI

LAST OFFERS AND REJECTION—FROM "OLIVE BRANCH" TO "PEN-ULTIMATUM"

(1899)

THE Last Chance for Peace—Chamberlain's "Olive Branch"—Milner's Doubts—World Opinion advises Kruger to accept—Unwilling Tributes to the Colonial Secretary—A Surprising Move at Pretoria—Smuts negotiates and Chamberlain responds—Boer Afterthoughts are Fatal—Impossible Conditions and the other Chamberlain—"The Sands are running down"—From Patience to Decision—Lord Salisbury's Slow Mood—Chamberlain carries the Cabinet—His "Final Offer" and Liberal Praises—The Boers unyielding—President Kruger and the 83rd Psalm—The "Interim" Dispatch Foreshadows a British Ultimatum—The End of Negotiations.

I

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DE VILLIERS, Chief Justice at the Cape, was a statesman amongst lawyers. Understanding both sides better than any other man of either race, he described the British proposal of joint enquiry as "an olive branch". Chamberlain telegraphed his instructions to the High Commissioner. "I now authorise you to invite President Kruger to appoint delegates to discuss with ours question whether reforms, which Volksraad has passed, will give immediate and substantial representation of Uitlanders, and if not, what additions and alterations will be necessary to secure this result. . . ."[1] Ignoring strict classical symbolism, we may say that the olive branch, transmitted without enthusiasm by the High Commissioner, was rather deposited at Pretoria than received.

Chamberlain had done what lay in man, without seeking war, to prepare the Cabinet and the country for that risk, but he still sought conciliation. By now Milner believed in nothing but

[1] C.9518 of 1899, No. 17 (Chamberlain to Milner, July 31, 1899).

pressure. The mild device of joint enquiry into the seven years law took him by surprise and left him sceptical. The Boers would not be brought by verbal argument to change it from what it was into what it ought to be. Milner would have preferred unbending insistence on his Bloemfontein minimum, five years' retrospective franchise. Natal, said its Governor privately, was "disturbed about Mr. Chamberlain's court of enquiry: it looks like hesitation". To Johannesburg it looked like the thing which is weaker than hesitation. At home, a jingo tribe amongst the Tories feared that Kruger would seize what they thought a weak offer. Chamberlain's proposal found wide support amongst critics nowise thankful to him but eager for the Boer cause. They felt that President Kruger was offered a saving opportunity. Hofmeyr, Schreiner, with other Afrikanders at the Cape and in the Orange Free State, advised and entreated acceptance of joint enquiry.

II

Wiser and sadder than any of them, Sir Henry de Villiers saw yet deeper. His inmost soul told him that this golden chance was the last. Towards Chamberlain, who respected him, he was temperate rather than unbiased. The letter in which the Chief Justice spoke of "an olive branch" has often been reprinted, but for memorable instruction on the South African trouble one passage must be quoted again:

DE VILLIERS VERSUS KRUGER

July 31.—Mr. Chamberlain's Speech was more moderate than I expected it would be, and as he holds out an olive branch in the form of a joint Enquiry into the franchise proposals, would it not be well to meet him in this matter? . . . The British public is determined to see the matter through, and, if a contest is begun, will not rest until the Transvaal has completely submitted . . . I confess that I dread the prospect of a war of races in South Africa. . . . Try to induce him [Kruger] to meet Mr. Chamberlain in a friendly manner and at once remove all the causes of unrest which have disturbed this unhappy country for so many years.[1]

[1] Correspondence found at Bloemfontein (Sir J. H. de Villiers to Mr. Fischer, July 31, 1899). Cd. 369. p. 3.

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The effect on European opinion was as good. The Netherlands Government, like the German, warned Pretoria not to spurn this chance. Dr. Leyds found no encouragement amongst foreign Powers.

At home, fair Liberals agreed that joint enquiry ought to be accepted on its merits. The special tactics of the Colonial Secretary's more rabid enemies are amongst the pathological curiosities of politics. Labouchere and others, with the same impotent ingenuity as for so many years past, implored Kruger to seize upon the new British proposal and turn it into a trap for its author. Here was a unique chance "to give Master Joe" another fall—to discomfit him, perhaps undo him, by the futility of long-drawn discussion ending in a fiasco of disagreement. At this the Transvaal agent in London reported to Pretoria:

August 4.— . . . I have been able to judge of the effect upon our friends of hints that we may not be able to accept the proposed Commission. Without exception they are one and all dead against our refusing it, and all agree that we shall have to face a very serious crisis if we refuse the proposal, and that without the friendly support of the majority of the newspapers which have hitherto been on our side. . . . In other words: gain as much time as you can, and give the public time here to get out of the dangerous frame of mind which Chamberlain's speeches have created. . . . Labouchere said to me this morning: "Don't, for goodness sake, let Mr. Kruger make his first mistake by refusing this; a little skilful management and he will give Master Joe another fall." He further said: "You are such past masters in the art of gaining time, here is an opportunity; you surely haven't let your right hands lose their cunning, and you ought to spin out the negotiations for quite two or three months. . . ."[1]

Through the same intermediary, "Labby" sought to work on Pretoria against the Colonial Secretary by more poisoned tittle-tattle: Chamberlain was in the safe custody of his colleagues:

August 4.—It is the general opinion that Chamberlain "climbed down". As Bannerman put it to me: "His speech was a little bluster of his own with the main parts arranged by his colleagues, and they sat by like policemen to see that he read them". . . . The universal opinion is that

[1] Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 404-405 (Montagu White to Reitz).

the Cabinet has forced all this upon Chamberlain, and that they are determined not to have war and to do something to let him down easily. Salisbury's speech was conceived on these lines, and a little vague bluster but nothing more. I accentuated Bannerman's declaration about hostilities; this pledges the Liberal party against war.[1]

This is the sorry work of self-duped malevolence. It is a false account of Chamberlain, of the Cabinet, of a large part of Liberalism, of the balance of feeling in the House of Commons. When "Labby's" version reached Pretoria at a critical hour the effect was both plausible and pernicious. By that time other accounts from London had convinced the Boers that if foreign Powers failed them they could count again, and more surely than ever, upon the see-saw of the British party-system.

The conciliatory character of Chamberlain's action at this time is established by a consensus of evidence. General opinion abroad, Liberal opinion at home, Afrikander opinion at the Cape, advised President Kruger to reciprocate. When he showed signs of dour delay fifty alarmed Afrikander members of the Cape Parliament besought him. They entreated in effect: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him".

III

The Old Man seemed deaf as stone on that side of the head. He could no more modify himself at this juncture than the rocks of his veldt could alter their geology.

What of "my independence"? That, as at Bloemfontein, was his unchanging criterion. On sacred principle, from the outset, he rejected joint enquiry as a profane intrusion. "The Government S.A.R. deem a compliance with this request impossible, as it would be equivalent to a destruction of our independence."[2] Next, to a direct appeal from de Villiers, he replied:

I am sworn to uphold the independence of my country, and I have the very best reasons for believing that Chamberlain and Milner are determined to rob me of that independence.... The demand for the franchise

[1] Thorold's *Labouchere*, p. 406 (Labouchere to Montagu White).

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 483 (Kruger's telegram to Steyn, August 2, 1899).

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is but a pretence. . . . I am sorry that you think war can only end in the destruction of the Republic, but do you not believe that there is a power above greater even than that of England which will see that right and justice prevail? . . .[1]

His State Secretary, Reitz, declared, "the proposal to revise our law by means of a mixed commission" was all of a piece with the "rascally and bullying conduct" of British policy since the Jameson Raid.[2]

Knowing what we do of the Colonial Secretary's restraint and of the British Cabinet's reluctance, that the olive branch should be seen by Pretoria as an iron rod is a classical case of political illusion.

Above all, far above all, the President was resolved, as at Bloemfontein, not to yield on the franchise without securing some system of arbitration precluding all British interference in the future. As yet it lay in his power to make the nominal seven years' franchise law a simulacrum or a nullity. Joint enquiry he knew well would bind him. If he were to weaken his control over the Uitlanders, the Imperial factor must be neutralised.[3]

Towards mid-August these were still the latent contradictions, not yet brought into full light. The Colonial Secretary had expected prompt response. When the days pass without sign from Pretoria, he decides sharply that if Kruger refuses joint enquiry we must appoint our own Commission in South Africa to investigate the real effect of the Transvaal franchise law. Milner multiplies objections, dreading indefinite suspense, longing now to bring things as soon as possible to an ultimatum. Imperatively the Colonial Secretary insists upon his instructions.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

August 8.— . . . Of course negotiations take time and I regret the suspense and tension but it is worth while losing a week or two in order to have the nation at our back.

[1] Eric A. Walker, *Lord de Villiers*, pp. 346-347.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 348 (Reitz to de Villiers, August 14).

[3] Cd. 9404, p. 44, Verbatim Report of Bloemfontein Conference. On the questions of franchise and arbitration:

HIS EXCELLENCY: "He (Kruger) is linking two questions together, which in my mind are in no way linked together".

PRESIDENT: "Yes, I know his Excellency says that for him they are not bound together; but in my mind they do belong together".

August 14.—You are authorised if you think it desirable to inform Government S.A.R. that tension caused by delay is becoming dangerous and that we must press for an answer without delay to our invitation for appointment of Joint Commission. Failing such an answer, or if answer unfavourable you will immediately appoint Commission of three as previously instructed.

Before this message reached Cape Town, the moral situation was transformed again by the most unexpected of moves on the part of the Transvaal Government. Again in mid-August, as at the moment of his sanguine elation in mid-July, Chamberlain thought that the clouds showed bright rifts of blue. This opportunity for peace was the very last.

IV

On Sunday August 13 all Pretoria was excited. President Kruger and his officials that morning were shut up for two hours in the telegraph office. They were exchanging messages with Bloemfontein. What did it mean? First rumours said it meant immediate war—that the Boer Executive, alarmed at British movements on the border, were determined not to wait. But it was nearly two months yet before the rains would freshen the veldt for the horses.

In fact, this Sabbath telegraphing was concerned with new negotiations. What had happened? The day before, Conyngham Greene, British Agent at Pretoria, had been approached by a member of the Boer Government. Its emissary was its youngest and most brilliant member, Jan Smuts, since world-famous. He had qualifications possessed by no one else. He had won notable honours at Cambridge. The English liked him, and he them as much as the situation allowed. There were no illusions on either side. Not yet thirty, he had the root of statesmanship in him, though if it came to fighting he would be amongst the foremost. Acrid controversy arose out of the pourparlers thus begun. Misunderstandings and recriminations of that kind belong invariably to the preliminaries of war.

Following his first hints of a possible eirenicon, Smuts returned on this Sunday evening with proposals astonishing to the British Agent. They were put forward to exclude and replace the Mixed

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Commission.[1] On this condition Pretoria would remove every pretext for war. As regards the Uitlanders, Milner's own claim at Bloemfontein would be adopted and improved.

What were the Smuts proposals?

1. A five years' retrospective franchise which might become law in a fortnight.

2. As to representation, just over a quarter of the seats in the Volksraad. This proportion never to be reduced.

3. New burghers to have equal rights in the election of the President and Commandant-General.

4. The details of the new franchise law to be discussed with the British Agent, who may have his legal adviser.

5. The present intervention of Her Majesty's Government not to be a precedent.—No further British insistence on suzerainty, "the controversy on this subject being tacitly allowed to drop".—"Lastly arbitration, from which foreign element is excluded, to be conceded as soon as franchise scheme has become law."[2]

So far, all was radiant. The British Agent's breath was taken away for a moment. Recovering it, he entered into human conversation. Little wonder that, speaking for himself, he went "much too far"—as the High Commissioner thought and told the Colonial Office—in expressing his satisfaction and hope.

I have said as regards suzerainty that I feel sure H.M. Government will not and cannot abandon the right which the preamble to the Convention of 1881 gives them, but that they will have no desire to hurt Boer susceptibilities by publicly reasserting it, so long as no reason to do so is given them by the Government of the S.A.R.

As regards arbitration, they are willing that we should have any of our own judges or lawyers, English or Colonial, to represent us, and that the President or Umpire should be equally English, Colonial or Boer....

As regards suggested possibility of further Conference, State Attorney anticipates that this may now be allowed to lapse.

[1] On the very day, August 12, when the Smuts-Greene conversations began the Boer Executive had drafted a reply—held over and only delivered three weeks later—stating joint enquiry to be prejudicial to the independent status of the Republic, and requesting Her Majesty's Government "to abandon that invitation in the manner and form as at present proposed" (C.9530, pp. 29-30). See also the account by Smuts of these negotiations and Greene's comments in Cd. 43, 1899, pp. 48 *seq.*

[2] Transmitted to London, August 15. Cd. 9521, 1899, pp. 44 *seq.* (Greene to Milner, August 14, 1899). Cf. also Cd. 43, 1900, pp. 48 *seq.*

As regards language, the new members of the Volksraad would use their own.[1]

From Pretoria Greene sent two telegrams in immediate succession. The High Commissioner transmitted each exactly as it was received. One contained the definite memorandum which had been initialed by Smuts. The other reported the conversational ideas which were not binding. There was nothing to indicate that difference. The Colonial Office took them as successive sheets of a single telegram; and so Chamberlain read them. Disquieted by a bare summary of the first portion only, he had come up from Highbury to London. Then? A genuine five years' franchise and arbitration without foreign interference? It bettered dreams. So far from thinking, with the High Commissioner, that Greene had gone too far in unbosoming himself cordially to Smuts, the Colonial Secretary bluntly instructed Milner to be conciliatory in his turn.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

August 16.—If proposals now made through British Agent are duly authorised they evidently constitute an immense concession and even a considerable advance on your Bloemfontein proposals. I think it will be a great advantage to get this offer formally made in writing. From the moment you get the note the whole of the negotiations will be direct between the two Governments. . . . Meanwhile, we must obtain official confirmation of proposals and you must avoid any language which would lead S.A.R. to think that we are determined to pick a quarrel. Instruct British Agent at once in accordance with above.[2]

In the same vein, both happy and business-like, the Colonial Secretary informed the Prime Minister:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Colonial Office, August 16, 1899.—I came up to town to-day on an incomplete abstract of the enclosed telegram and with the impression that some serious step would have to be taken at once.

I was very much relieved to find that the full message seems to give

[1] C.9521, 1899 (Milner to Chamberlain, No. 34, pp. 45-46).

[2] Details of the new franchise law were to be discussed with Conyngham Greene.

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assurance of another climb-down on the part of Kruger which as far as I can see is really complete. . . .

Milner's account is a little alarming and he seems to me unnecessarily suspicious and pedantic in his adherence to form.

I think, however, that he must understand my telegram and see how important I consider it to be that the Boers should not be snubbed at this stage but rather encouraged to put their concessions on record. . . .

The Prime Minister is equally relieved, but—like most of the Cabinet for a long time—less favourable to Milner.

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

August 17.—I congratulate you on this telegram, which is very satisfactory. I agree in your criticism of Milner's comment. It looks as if he had been spoiling for the fight with some glee and does not like putting his clothes on again.

How utterly different is all this from many fond accounts of the Unionist Cabinet as with few exceptions a crew of ramping Jingoes—Chamberlain the chief war-dancer. For more than a generation, to the prejudice of Britain and the Empire, that caricature has been credited and disseminated by Liberal attacks, Afrikander repetitions and foreign historians.

V

Milner proved right in his grimmer conviction. The new hope collapsed.

The breakdown was caused by some change of mind—never yet fully explained—on the Boer side. Here let us have precision about dates. On Saturday, August 19, Kruger's official propositions were delivered.[1] They differed only a little, though thus much for the worse, from the Smuts memorandum. But on Monday, August 21, further reservations destroyed the basis of the overtures. The tone was hard, almost dictatorial.

Franchise and representation for the Uitlanders were made "*expressly conditional*" upon preliminary assurances from the Queen's Government on three points:

[1] C.9521, 1899, pp. 46-47 (State Secretary to British Agent, telegraphed by Milner).

"(*a*) In future not to interfere in internal affairs of the South African Republic.

"(*b*) Not to insist further on its assertion of existence of suzerainty.

"(*c*) To agree to arbitration." [1]

This ill-omened message was not an amendment but a revoke. As in the Ems dispatch, a *chamade* had been followed by a *fanfaronnade*—a parley had been changed to a challenge.

To the British Agent came from Smuts a note like a knell: "I do not believe that there is the slightest chance of an alteration or amplification. . . . It will be necessary therefore for you to arrive at your decision on the terms stated as they stand." [2] The date of this moral ultimatum must be well noted. It was August 25. It was the darkest date in the history of South Africa. The Boer ruler and his colleagues well knew in their hearts that they had presented terms which the British Government could not yield.

Kruger had clinched Chamberlain's will. Except when the London Convention was infringed, he had sought peace without swerving for more than three and a half years since the Raid. Now he recognised, once and for all, that his policy of "exhausting the resources of moral pressure" was itself exhausted. With the best attribute of a strong Minister, he, the soul of courage, had not feared to be called weak. Now the other side of a man whom no one ever under-estimated with impunity would reappear.

From his wife's letters to her parents in America, one passage must be quoted about life at Highbury in this recess. "On Wednesday Joe and I sallied forth after they had all gone to bed and walked all round the garden. The fresh fragrant air and the flood of moonlight, the deep mysterious shadows amongst the trees and shrubs, and the curious lines of the flowers gave it a new charm and we both wondered why we did not do it oftener." [3]

By strange coincidence this was the very day when the moral ultimatum conveyed by Smuts to the British Agent at Pretoria shattered all former expectation of an amicable settlement.

[1] C.9521, 1899, p. 47.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 49.
[3] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, August 25, 899.

VI

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Next day in these holiday circumstances of a shining summer the Colonial Secretary made a short, clanging speech addressed both to Britain and the Transvaal. It startled the nation and the Empire and was heard all over the world. Besieged by requests to give a public lead, he had hitherto declined. "It was an awkward moment", as he said in private. Now he felt it was high time to break silence and to use unmistakeable words. He was sure that he had the weight of the country at his back. Messages from Canada, Australia and elsewhere made him as sure of the Empire as a whole.

It was an odd occasion for a mortal warning. He had arranged some time before to throw open his grounds to the Liberal Unionists of Saint Bartholomew's Ward on Saturday, August 26. They had a bright afternoon for their garden party. During a break in the sports he stood on a grassy rise and addressed his audience in words that some thought impromptu. Not so. They were well considered as the compact phrasing showed. After a little pleasantry suited to the festival, his theme became ominous—that President Kruger had it still in his power to make an honourable and peaceable settlement, but the eleventh hour had struck. "The sands were running down in the glass."

> We have been, as you know, negotiating for the last three months with President Kruger. . . . Mr. Kruger procrastinates in his replies. He dribbles out reforms like water from a squeezed sponge and he either accompanies his offers with conditions which he knows to be impossible, or he refuses to allow us to make a satisfactory investigation of the nature and the character of those reforms. . . .
>
> The issues of peace and war are in the hands of President Kruger and of his advisers. . . . Will he speak the necessary words? The sands are running down in the glass. The situation is too fraught with danger, it is too strained for any indefinite postponement to be tolerated. The knot must be loosened, to use Mr. Balfour's words, or else we shall have to find other ways of untying it.
>
> And if we do that, if we are forced to that, then I would repeat now the warning that was given by Lord Salisbury in the House of Lords and I would say that if we are forced to make further preparations, and

if this delay continues much longer, we shall not hold ourselves limited by what we have already offered. . . . And if it should come to this—if the rupture which we have done everything in our power to avoid should be forced upon us—I am confident we shall have the support of the vast majority of the people of the United Kingdom, and I will go further and say of the vast majority of the people of the British Empire. . . .

The ring of a voice cannot carry further than this went. Chamberlain could not reveal his knowledge that "take it or leave it" was the latest message of the Transvaal Government. At that eleventh hour the force of his admonition was more necessary than the country could yet be allowed to know. The general tone is measured. One metaphor was assailed by his opponents and justly criticised by many Unionists. Personal satire likening Kruger to a "squeezed sponge" ought to have been omitted from any declaration upon a choice between peace and war. But to say that "the sands were running down in the glass" was not only good English; no figure of language could be closer to the truth as we have seen it to stand.

Two days later, amidst the hubbub about the Highbury speech, the Colonial Secretary addressed to Pretoria a dispatch designedly most mild. He had shown the iron hand; he drew on again the velvet glove. This method before coming to final issues had always been his characteristic. He was set to put his claim so low that if the Transvaal refused, or resorted once more to dilatory indefiniteness, his own fighting position would be impregnable.

What did he do? He assumed that the large immediate enfranchisement proposed by Milner at Bloemfontein would now be conceded in any case. Instead of joint enquiry, though unable to appreciate the objections to it, he would be content that the British Agent with assistants should make examination and report. He hoped that the Transvaal Government would wait for the results of this procedure and that amending suggestions, if required, would be met with a friendly mind. So much for the franchise. What of the stipulations by the Transvaal on the other questions? On them too the dispatch was a pattern of moderation. In effect he said that the Queen's Ministers desired

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nothing more than to shun avoidable interference with Transvaal affairs. And this, if only the Boers and the Liberal Opposition at home could have realised it, was true.

> . . . First, as regards intervention: Her Majesty's Government hope that the fulfilment of the promises made and the just treatment of the Uitlanders in future will render unnecessary any further intervention on their behalf, but Her Majesty's Government cannot of course debar themselves from their rights under the Conventions, nor divest themselves of the ordinary obligations of a civilised Power to protect its subjects in a foreign country from injustice.
>
> Secondly, with regard to suzerainty, Her Majesty's Government would refer the Government of the South African Republic to the second paragraph of my despatch of 13th July. [Stating they had no wish to continue the etymological controversy with the Transvaal, whose claim, however, to be a Sovereign International State, "is not in their opinion warranted either by law or history and is wholly inadmissible."]
>
> Thirdly, Her Majesty's Government agree to a discussion of the form and scope of a Tribunal of Arbitration from which foreigners and foreign influence are excluded. . . .[1]

To hot Unionists this dispatch after the strong stuff of the Highbury speech was another mystifying weakness. They knew nothing of the very man or his methods. He was the same in action as in speaking, when he always lowered his voice before a dangerous passage. Simultaneously with the mild dispatch he sent a private telegram to Milner. It was the Highbury speech itself compressed into a very few formidable lines:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

August 28.—*British Agent may inform State Secretary as his own opinion based on Lord Salisbury's reference to Sibylline books*[2] *and speech of Secretary of State at Birmingham on Saturday, that if reply to last telegram from H.M. Government is not prompt and satisfactory and if it becomes necessary to despatch further troops, H.M. Government will feel*

[1] C.9521, pp. 49-50 (Telegram from Chamberlain to Milner, August 28, 1899).

[2] Lord Salisbury protested that he had made no reference to the "Sibylline books", but his speech of July 28 is charged with inference in that sense.

justified in withdrawing previous suggestions for compromise and will formulate their own demands for a settlement.[1]

This is a capital piece in the present book. The Colonial Secretary was at Highbury and his colleagues were dispersed. He felt so certain of himself and of the course now to be taken that without consultation he had fixed the policy to which the Cabinet must come. The next thing was to bring them to it.

From this point, before we come to the play of real forces in the last weeks of nominal peace, the course of diplomacy must be swiftly sketched. Regretting that their recent terms had not found acceptance, the Boer Government withdrew the offer of reform on the Bloemfontein basis.[2] They reverted to the seven years' franchise law with all its complications and obscurities. And at this belated hour, when in South Africa every moment pulsed and throbbed with fate, they asked for further information concerning the original proposals for joint enquiry into franchise details and for subsequent conference on other matters. That olive branch was tendered at the end of July. Now was the beginning of September. There was a gulf between. And still the Boer Government did not accept joint enquiry. They only awaited further information. Another vista was opened of interminable delay and hopeless uncertainty. It was more than British repute in South Africa could now bear or British opinion at home endure.

VII

There was no turning back for the Colonial Secretary nor for the Unionist Government. Chamberlain was done for ever with chaffering on the Transvaal franchise. That issue, insoluble by itself, had become insignificant by comparison with other issues.

The mood of the head of the Government had been a difficulty, but not of the kind then asserted by the Opposition and repeated by most writers since. Perhaps as little as any Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary in our annals, Lord Salisbury was disinclined to hasten and still more to be hastened. We have seen that the silent obstinacy of his resistance to German pressure was a distinctive influence on the period. He reacted against

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 493. The italics are the biographer's.

[2] C.9521, 1899, pp. 52-54 (September 2).

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Milner's urgings. He would go his own pace; he would not be hurried, "not by all the English in South Africa". But for him, too, procrastination was over when at "the eleventh hour" the Boer Government again suggested interminable delay. There was no demur on the Prime Minister's part from the next step—emphatic indeed but not hurrying in the sense he still deprecated.

To the momentous Cabinet of Friday, September 8, Chamberlain submitted his draft of the historic communication containing the final offer of Her Majesty's Government. Before we come to the tenor, it is again important for the truth of history to establish one fact. That draft was adopted by his colleagues without substantial alteration. It was passed by the Cabinet without any change whatever in the sense. Such small verbal emendations as were introduced did not touch the operative part of the phrasing. When John Morley heard next day "that J. C. had a 'check' in the Cabinet", and that this was why negotiations continued,[1] the old friend ready for the moment to believe any evil, was fully misinformed. Worse, for effect on Afrikander opinion, the biographer of Lord de Villiers not only follows this partisan gossip but states it as fact—"Chamberlain under pressure from his fellow Ministers went forward with the negotiations".[2] The dissemination of slander against some statesmen may become a habit not only automatic but unconscious.

The dispatch was received with almost universal satisfaction at home—even by most English Liberals hostile to the Colonial Secretary. They still said that the credit for the "mild dispatch" was due to the firm wisdom of Lord Salisbury. The text was Chamberlain's own. The whole credit for its reasonableness as well as for its force belongs to himself. It may be found in the blue-book and other books,[3] and cannot be repeated here as its concise excellence deserves. Its purport was this:

THE FINAL OFFER TO THE TRANSVAAL

(September 8, 1899)

1. Her Majesty's Government absolutely repudiates the claim of the

[1] Gardiner, *Life of Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 502.

[2] Walker, *Life of Lord de Villiers*, p. 353.

[3] C.9521, p. 64 (Chamberlain to High Commissioner, September 9, 1899).

Transvaal to be a Sovereign International State and cannot consider any proposal conditional on the acceptance of that claim.

2. On this ground the answer of the South African Republic is unacceptable.

3. Her Majesty's Government are still prepared to accept reform as proposed by Mr. Reitz on August 19 [five years' franchise, one quarter of the seats in the Raad, an equal vote in the election of President and Commandant], provided that enquiry, whether joint or unilateral, shall show that these concessions in principle are secured in fact; and assuming that the English language will be allowed in the Raad.

4. Acceptance in Pretoria of these terms would at once remove the tension, and in all probability would render unnecessary any further intervention on behalf of the Uitlanders.

5. "Her Majesty's Government are increasingly impressed with the danger of further delay in relieving the strain which has already caused so much injury to the interests of South Africa, and they earnestly press for an immediate and definite reply" to their present proposal.

6. "If it is acceded to they will be ready to make immediate arrangements" for a further Conference between President and High Commissioner to establish a Tribunal of Arbitration; and to discuss remaining matters which in their nature are not suitable for reference to that Tribunal but may be readily settled in friendly discussion.

7. *If, however, as they most anxiously hope will not be the case, the reply of the South African Government is negative or inconclusive, Her Majesty's Government must reserve to themselves the right to reconsider the situation* de novo *and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement.*[1]

Chamberlain as it happened had never felt more sharply the personal animosity towards himself. He regretted it more for the country's sake than for his own. He always held that but for this a solid nation might have won a peaceful adjustment.

National excitement was now rising rapidly. There were many signs of the coming fierceness of controversy in the nation. In mid-September a great Liberal gathering at Manchester fanned more feeling than any meeting held in that city for many years. Despite interruptions, it was a fervent anti-war demonstration. John Morley, the chief speaker, urged the South African Republic to do its part by conceding large and immediate electoral

[1] The italics are the biographer's.

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reform. They ought "to grant this five years' franchise without dubious terms". They could not withdraw now from that offer. On that point he did not quarrel with the Government.[1] At the same meeting Leonard Courtney, staunch and brave pro-Boer from of old, "hailed with satisfaction the latest despatch of Mr. Chamberlain; it was a rebuke to the fire-eaters". Asquith wrote privately that Kruger must "divest himself of a little of his Arcadian astuteness and come to reasonable terms".[2] Sir William Harcourt himself followed Morley in declaring, despite his censures of Ministerial policy, that President Kruger having once offered the five years' franchise should have stuck to it.[3] Amongst Afrikanders at the Cape it was the same. Once more Hofmeyr and Schreiner implored Mr. Kruger to accept at the last time of asking.

In three days Pretoria made up its mind otherwise, and refused the final British offer. Its reply was a solid negative thickly wrapped in woolly words. This answer repudiated the spirit of the Smuts-Greene negotiations and virtually charged the British Agent with bad faith. It repelled with especial warmth the strange notion that English could be allowed in the Volksraad—though two languages were on equal terms at the Cape as at Ottawa. Finally the Transvaal Government declared quite plainly at long last its acceptance of joint enquiry.[4] But enquiry into what? Into what was now obsolete in the controversy, the Seven Years Law with all its obstructions instead of the plain "five years' franchise without dubious terms" which the strongest Boer sympathisers in England urged them to concede.

VIII

This meant the irreparable rupture of negotiations. In answer to Chamberlain's request for "immediate and definite" measures to relieve the tension, the Boer Executive once more proposed incalculable delay without the faintest presumption of settlement at the end of it.

The High Commissioner in his messages to the Secretary of

[1] Manchester, September 15.

[2] J. A. Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. i. p. 242 (September 14).

[3] Harcourt at Tredegar, September 20.

[4] C.9530, 1899, pp. 11-13. Milner to Chamberlain (Sept. 16).

State had multiplied his representations that the suspense in South Africa must be terminated. Johannesburg was in distress and disarray; business paralysed and all minds distracted. Presently the British Agent reported suffering, panic, departures swelling to an exodus.

The Boer mind is another study. Kruger held out inexorably against Hofmeyr and all other Afrikanders who implored him to settle the franchise dispute by itself on Chamberlain's basis and so avert war. Typical was his outburst in an excited Raad. He dwelt upon his inevitable word. "He had given a great deal, but he could not give his independence. They had asked for his trousers and he had given them; then for his coat, he had given that also; now they wanted his life, and that he could not give."[1]

Here without doubt his inmost soul speaks in his homely images. He meant to keep his sway over the strangers. To that end, were British intervention excluded, he could always rearrange the franchise as he had done before. Well over his three score and ten, full of trust both in Providence and powder, Oom Paul made himself ready in spirit for unbelievable battle, not doubting of victory. The nominal odds against him might be called mighty. He thought the real odds were heavily on his side. We shall soon see why he might well think so according to his lights. In those days he quoted to himself and commended to his burghers the eighty-third Psalm, that desperate cry of malediction and deliverance—"a complaint to God of the enemies' conspiracies", says the old heading. "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people. . . . They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation. . . . Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea let them be put to shame and perish. . . ."

For the Colonial Secretary the end of negotiations on the old lines brought into play the defined alternative. "Her Majesty's Government must reserve to themselves the right to reconsider the situation *de novo*, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement." Even yet he was not quite sure that the Cabinet which had sanctioned these words would support them

[1] *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, edited by L. S. Amery, vol. i. p. 337 (September 7).

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with willing decision. But Chamberlain was now determined to bring the Government to action, and was not to be gainsaid. The military measures and his connection with them must be dealt with separately in the next chapter. On the political side he had to contrive a dispatch momentous yet reticent. It must not trumpet the final challenge but it must give forth no uncertain sound.

IX

The Cabinet could not launch a summons which might well precipitate hostilities before British reinforcements could reach Natal. Yet mere mutism on the part of the British Government after the last reply from the Transvaal would be a moral disaster. As Chamberlain said, it was an impossible course. How then devise a communication impressive but not peremptory?

In this dilemma Chamberlain to his credit, like Beaconsfield before him, was not above suggestion from an able Editor. E. T. Cook, then of the *Daily News*, possessed rare gifts of judgment and clarity. In several articles he recommended what he called an "interim" dispatch asserting the reason as well as firmness of British policy but deferring definite demands and giving Kruger another chance to reflect. The diary of the able Editor must be quoted here:

> Went to see Selborne after Cabinet Meeting [Sept. 22] to ask what had been done. "Mr. Chamberlain", he said, "told me to give you a hint that your despatch had been adopted. I drafted one and you drafted one, and in some respects the Cabinet preferred yours. This is probably the only occasion on which an editor of the *Daily News* has drafted a despatch for a Conservative Government".[1]

The Chamberlain Papers contain no note of this incident. There is no doubt, however, that on Friday, September 22, the Unionist Cabinet on the Colonial Secretary's proposition agreed that the reply to Pretoria should follow a wise newspaper article of the same morning. Differing in phrase and arrangement from that article, the official document was to play a part little expected. Its character must be noted well.

[1] J. Saxon Mills, *Sir Edward Cook, Wrongs of the Transvaal War*, pp. p. 188; and E. T. Cook, *Rights and* 217-225.

THE END OF NEGOTIATIONS[1]

(September 22, 1899)

1. . . . The offer [of September 8] made by Her Majesty's Government was moderate and conciliatory and they have to express their profound regret that reply of Government of the South African Republic is a refusal to accept it.

2. Her Majesty's Government have on more than one occasion repeated their assurances that they have no desire to interfere in any way with the independence of the South African Republic, provided that the conditions on which it was granted are honourably observed in the spirit and in the letter, and they have offered as part of a general settlement to give a complete guarantee against any attack upon that independence, either from within any part of the British dominions or from the territory of a Foreign State.

3. They have not asserted any rights of interference in the internal affairs of the Republic other than those which are derived from the Conventions[2] between the two countries or which belong to every neighbouring government (and especially to one which has a largely predominant interest in the adjacent territories) for the protection of its subjects and of its adjoining possessions. *But they have been compelled by the action of the Government of the South African Republic, who have in their note of 9th May* 1899 *asserted the right of the Republic to be a Sovereign International State, absolutely to deny and repudiate this claim.*[3]

4. The object which Her Majesty's Government have had in view in the recent negotiations has been stated in a manner which cannot admit of misapprehension, viz, to obtain such a substantial and immedi-

[1] The italics in two passages following are the biographer's.

[2] On account of using the plural here instead of relying only upon the Convention of 1884 Chamberlain was ingeniously accused of introducing a superfluous "s" and making "war for a consonant". We have seen that the two Conventions of 1881 and 1884 had been associated not only by the Unionist Government but by the Liberal Government before.

[3] Sir William Harcourt had declared two days before: "You cannot say suzerainty when you have only a partial suzerainty. So, you cannot claim the position of a Sovereign International State when you have surrendered the control of your foreign affairs. . . . I have always said that that claim on the part of the Transvaal Government was not justified—that the British Government were right in repudiating it" (Speech at New Tredegar, September 20, 1899). A few weeks earlier Count Hatzfeldt, the German ambassador in London, longing for the Colonial Secretary's failure, telegraphed to his Government that Kruger, by ceasing his foolish demand for an express British renunciation of suzerainty, can yet make Chamberlain "fall into the gutter" (*Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 390; August 29, 1899).

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ate representation for the Uitlanders in the South African Republic as Her Majesty's Government hoped would relieve them from any necessity for further interference on their behalf, and would enable the Uitlanders to secure for themselves that fair and just treatment which was formally promised to them in 1881, and which Her Majesty intended to secure for them when she granted the privilege of self-government to the inhabitants of the Transvaal.

5. As was stated in my [Chamberlain's] telegram of 8th Sept. Her Majesty's Government are of opinion that no conditions less comprehensive than those contained in their offer of that date[1] can be relied upon to effect this object.

6. The refusal of the Government of the South African Republic to entertain the offer thus made, coming as it does at the end of nearly four months of protracted negotiations, themselves the climax of an agitation extending over a period of more than five years, makes it useless to further pursue a discussion on the lines hitherto followed, and *Her Majesty's Government are now compelled to consider the situation afresh, and to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement of the issues which have been created in South Africa by the policy constantly followed for many years by the Government of the South African Republic.*[2] They will communicate to you [the High Commissioner] the result of their deliberations in a later despatch.[3]

This document is not inspired by rapacious aggression seeking to crush the Boers in order to seize the gold-fields and aggrandise the Empire. If the Transvaal will agree even now to settle the Uitlander question by real reform, Her Majesty's Government, hoping to be relieved from any necessity for further interference, will guarantee against all external dangers the maintenance of the Republic. By amiable men this declaration of policy was variously described as "giving President Kruger another chance", or "building a golden bridge" for the Boers. Though Chamberlain and his colleagues would have welcomed last-hour concessions, they felt war to be almost certain, and chiefly

[1] That "final offer", briefly recalled, was to accept a five years' retrospective franchise, truly granted, the use of English by the new members being allowed in the Raad. Were this conceded, settlement of all other questions to be sought by friendly and speedy conference between President Kruger and the High Commissioner.

[2] The italics above are the biographer's.

[3] C.9530, 1899, pp. 16-17 (Chamberlain to Milner, September 22).

trusted that this delay of their foreshadowed ultimatum would gain some little time, as it did, for strengthening British defence in South Africa. The "interim dispatch" was highly approved by all moderate opinion at home.

At Pretoria by all the ironies the effect was dire. President Kruger meant what he had said. He would not concede broad reform unless in effect and once for all his full and sovereign Independence were recognised. Nor would he wait for Her Majesty's Government "to formulate their own proposals for a final settlement". Instead of a "golden bridge" appearing there was a breaking of all bridges. The real forces behind the verbal arguments leaped into view and action.

CHAPTER LXVII

WORDS AND ARMS—THE BOERS DECLARE WAR

(1899)

"ARMAMENTS and Security" in South Africa—The Colonial Secretary and the War Office—Growing Transvaal Power and British Weakness—The Strange Case of General Butler—The Cabinet and the Military Problem—Chamberlain insists on Reinforcements—The First Ten Thousand—Pretoria refuses the Final Offer—The Interim Dispatch and the Army Corps—What Chamberlain's Ultimatum would have been—"Disarmament" in South Africa: the Seventh Demand—The Republics resolve to Strike First—High Confidence and the Great Decision—Rapidity of Boer Mobilisation and British Delusions—How Chamberlain received the Boer Ultimatum—"They have done it"—Race-Issues and World-Issues in 1899—Chamberlain and Kruger.

I

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"ARBITRATION ought to entail disarmament."[1] These words from Milner, just before the Colonial Secretary tendered his olive-branch to Pretoria at the end of July, went to the core. The Transvaal by degrees had become armed and superarmed in the spirit of military Europe. The Boers attained a fighting-strength reducing to relative insignificance the ordinary British garrisons in South Africa. This disparity ceaselessly increased, and eventual war was its logic.

The open negotiations with the Transvaal have been narrated separately to avoid confusion. Meanwhile military questions had become paramount. To understand more of the Colonial Secretary's inmost mind, of the workings of the Cabinet, and of the rival mobilisations before war was proclaimed, we must look back for a moment.

In successive sessions he had been questioned in the House

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 471 (Milner to Chamberlain, July 26, 1899).

upon the continuous importation of war material into the Transvaal. To him the worst feature of the South African problem was the unique anomaly of an armed power forcibly financed by those whom it subjected. Taxation without representation of the Uitlanders enabled the Boers to build central forts; to acquire artillery; to accumulate munitions at the expense of the industrial majority. Never were armaments of a modern type so dominant over those who paid for them and so cheap to the possessors. Only within a couple of generations past had their ancestors taken this land from the natives. No such claim as theirs to racial mastery over a later and larger influx of white immigrants had ever been known in any of the world's colonial fields. But it must also be admitted that no such inherently difficult case of racial and economic contact had arisen.

It is impossible to understand British or Boer diplomacy in the last weeks before the outbreak of war, or Chamberlain's course, or the war itself, without attending to the following illustrations.

When the Bloemfontein Conference broke up, President Steyn hurried out and sent a large order to Germany for rifles and cartridges. The Orange Free State voted £14,000 for artillery and over £60,000 for other war material. Early in July Commandant Joubert sent 500 cases of ammunition to the allied Republic. During subsequent weeks up to the end of August the Bond Ministry allowed over a million Mauser cartridges, besides other munitions, to pass through the colony itself to the same destination. In the third week of August when the clouds rifted and closed again, the Portuguese, after a hesitation very alarming to President Kruger's Government, suddenly released an immense consignment of Mauser cartridges, and in fifty truckloads, weighing ten tons each, they were entrained at Delagoa Bay for the Transvaal.[1]

The Creusot and Krupp artillery large and light in the Transvaal was of the best, and backed by sufficient ammunition for a long struggle. The German official history estimated in its measured way that there were nearly 80,000 rifles in the allied Republics at the point of diplomacy—three weeks before the war—already reached in this narrative; and that the Transvaal

[1] E. T. Cook, *Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War*, p. 306.

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had 80,000,000 cartridges in store.[1] There were resources enough to equip not only every available male of fighting age in the two Republics, but the big reinforcement counted on from the Cape Dutch. By equipment, position and mobility the Boers relatively to their numbers—and the two Republics together could put 50,000 men into the field apart from the expected rising of 40,000 Cape Dutch—were a most formidable foe.

British military forces at this time in South Africa were puny. And for months their moral position had been egregious owing to a personal reason for which the War Office was delectably responsible. Chamberlain dreaded our War Office more than the Boers.

II

That institution had chosen, amongst all imaginable men, General Sir William Butler for the chief command in South Africa. The appointment was made in the late autumn of 1898 without reference either to Colonial Secretary or High Commissioner. Well might Chamberlain exclaim later, "But what is to be said of those who without consulting the Minister chiefly responsible sent to South Africa the one man most unfitted by his history and character to occupy an important post there at the present time?" [2]

The appointment was a grievous wrong to the officer whose career was frustrated by promotion. Tall, handsome, very military and very courteous in bearing, full of gifts and chivalry, Butler was every inch a soldier and something of a Quixote. Married to the painter of the "Roll Call", his own descriptive books of travel and adventure delighted boys, while fastidious critics ranked him one of the purest stylists of his day. He had lately refreshed his old military knowledge of South Africa by writing the life of Colley, his comrade who fell at Majuba.

So far he might seem the very man. But he was disqualified for this one post by the ardour of his political sympathies. As an impassioned Irish Nationalist his heart was altogether with the Boers and the Afrikanders. By comparison he saw Johannes-

[1] *The German Official Account of the War in South Africa* (English translation), vol. i. p. 20.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 527 (Chamberlain to Milner, September 2, 1899).

burg as the chosen city of Beelzebub; and regarded Rhodes and confederate magnates as evil beings.

Could Chamberlain have had his way, without hesitation he would have appointed Lord Roberts, who, for some time before, had much wished for this command, as he had let the Colonial Secretary know; and to whom our statesman had written formerly when trouble threatened, "I should feel success assured if you were responsible for the military control".

As it happened, the new General on arriving at Cape Town, towards the end of 1898, had to fulfil a political rôle as Acting High Commissioner while Milner was at home. Instead of carrying on in a formal and neutral way, he reversed Milner's spirit. When the High Commissioner took charge again, his relations with his military colleague soon became unendurable. With faultless manners the General confined himself to the punctilio of his duties, but would not go beyond them. At first a sense of very high comedy lightened intercourse at Government House with Milner as polite as the General. But after the Bloemfontein Conference, when arms and ammunition were pouring into the Transvaal, the situation became an agony to the Queen's representative. Were the contingency of war mentioned the Commander-in-Chief exclaimed, "A crime, a crime!"

When Woolls-Sampson, a fighting Britisher, incautiously consulted the General about raising a force of Uitlanders there was a furious scene. "Lunatic," cried one; "traitor," cried the other. The whisper amongst the British stirring for themselves, was: "For Heaven's sake let nothing about the army get known to the Commander-in-Chief".[1] Yet afterwards Milner always said of this soldier, "His merit was that he knew the size of the job".

III

"Dear old Butler" of Afrikander affections was at last transferred to the Western Command at home [2] and departed from Cape Town just before Chamberlain declared at Highbury that the sands were running down in the glass. Yet the British

[1] Conversation of the writer with Lord Milner, Whitsuntide 1921.

[2] On August 3, 1899, Chamberlain telegraphed briefly and secretly to Milner that "the General" was to be recalled.

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military plight by contrast with the strength of the Transvaal was miserable, and might well tempt the Boers, as it did, to make war. We had only 9000 regular troops in South Africa[1] and these were distributed round the exterior lines of an immense region.

Early in June Lord Wolseley, the Commander-in-Chief, wished indeed as a "significant demonstration" to mobilise immediately on Salisbury Plain or at Aldershot an army corps and a cavalry division and other details. Early in July he advised that at least, as a precaution, 10,000 men ought to go out very soon. But the Cabinet declined, anxious to avoid the appearance of menace; and the Treasury was stiff against premature outlay. So prodigal may be the ultimate expense of small economies.

Chamberlain, as regards the army corps, thought "The House of Commons would never allow such a despatch of troops without evidence of immediate danger".[2] But against the majority of the Cabinet he was all for the precautionary step of sending 10,000 men.

The Government were hampered by the familiar habits of the party system. If they took marked military precautions before plain danger impended, Liberal and Irish denunciation would accuse them of desiring what they wished to prevent; every evil and risk in South Africa would be aggravated.

Just two months before the outbreak of war the Cabinet were informed that "as matters then stood, it would not be possible to place a mobilised Army Corps and a Cavalry Division in the north of Natal under about four months". The time might be reduced by one month were special expenditure authorised at once. To Chancellors of Exchequer the sum of £1,000,000 looked large in those days. At this Chamberlain's ire exploded:

CHAMBERLAIN ON THE WAR OFFICE

August 14.—*To Selborne.*—I understand that the W.O. which a few months ago was boasting that it could send off two Army Corps in less time than transports could be obtained to carry them—has now convinced itself that it cannot place *one* corps in Natal in less than 4 months

[1] *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. i. p. 304.

[2] Chamberlain to Lansdowne, July 15, 1899.

—but that this time could be shortened to 3 months if we are ready to spend immediately more than a million sterling in necessary preparations!! Then I suppose we shall be ready "to the last button".

They are hopeless and it will be a mercy if they do not land us in a catastrophe.

September 1.—*To Goschen.*—It is terribly like the *état major* and the "ready to the last button" of 1870. I cannot trust myself to say what I think of the futility of the present W.O. Heaven help us if we get into trouble.

For weeks the High Commissioner has maintained that the rising preponderance of Boer armaments is behind all the trouble in South Africa and that there can be no thorough solution without disarmament.

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN (THE MILITARY PROBLEM)[1]

July 16.— . . . Question of armaments is of supreme importance to future position. . . . Intolerable if we are overshadowed by S.A.R. as a military power; there must be disarmament.

August 2.— . . . Must we not after all this disturbance raise the question of disarmament and of that fort at Johannesburg which is such an outrage and so embitters the Uitlanders. It is preposterous that if we are to try and live at peace with the Transvaal and to arbitrate, that State should remain a military power out of all proportion to the rest of South Africa.

August 16.— . . . I think the result all depends on our staying power. They will collapse if we don't weaken, or rather if we go on steadily turning the screw. . . .

August 23.— . . . We have got the S.A.R. to go as far as they will go without, not merely the threat but the actual application of force. I do not say war, for there is always a probability that with an army actually on their borders they will submit to everything, including disarmament. But to mere displays of force at a distance they will pay no further heed. The question therefore is simply whether Great Britain is prepared to make that great effort which will finally settle the South African question. . . .

August 30.— . . . It is evident that as someone said to me long ago,

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

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"Kruger will bluff up to the cannon's mouth". The big expedition, which would be so costly, is necessary to get him down on his knees with or without fighting. I know what such an expedition means *for you*. It may be more than Great Britain can rise to. . . .

Next, Milner protested in effect that the irresolution of Her Majesty's Government was ruin to every British interest in South Africa and implored a termination of suspense.[1] From other sources Chamberlain knew already the growing conviction in Johannesburg that not "Franchise First" but "Disarmament First" was now the solution. The Governor of Natal informed him of the rising feeling in that colony—on whose border the supremacy of Boer force hung like a cloud—that without disarmament there could be no "real and permanent settlement".[2] When the Colonial Secretary's hopes for peace had been highest in mid-August, he had telegraphed to Milner: "If present negotiations are successful, it would be most desirable if we could come to some permanent arrangement as to armament. If Boers would disarm Johannesburg Fort and give promise to cease importing arms and ammunition we might reduce troops in South Africa by half." [3] He repeated the idea to Lord Salisbury, who scouted it with unmatched skill in the dialectic of scepticism. "As to mutual disarmament with the Transvaal, such an agreement . . . would not, I fear, work well. The Boers will hate us for another half-century; and, therefore, would never adhere to any promise of the kind they might make; and would use our promise against us in the most inconvenient way. The agreement would, I am convinced, cause more friction, and would furnish more causes of quarrel, than any other circumstance in our relations." [4]

IV

Whatever might be his speculations about future disarmament in South Africa as one means of reconciling the races, when Chamberlain made his warning speech at Highbury, he was in no doubt about the immediate imperative. With-

[1] C.9521, 1899, p. 51 (Milner to Chamberlain, August 31, 1899).

[2] Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, Governor of Natal, to Chamberlain (August 12, 1899).

[3] Chamberlain to Milner, August 16.

[4] Salisbury to Chamberlain, August 29.

out delay a first strong step must be taken to reinforce the perilous British position in Natal. Already he had written to the War Minister: "If we do not arrive at a settlement in the next week or ten days I think we must send out an instalment of 10,000 men. I should myself greatly prefer they should come from India—with the public announcement that they will be followed by an army corps."[1]

When after "the next week or ten days" there was still no peaceful settlement nor sign of it, he sat down after a very long day's work and wrote in the small hours one of the best of his political letters. He is for giving Kruger "one more chance" to say Yea or Nay on the franchise. But in this he is more tactical than hopeful. He feels war to be now as probable as deplorable. He is ready for it but has no illusions about its crucial implications or its thankless character. The main thing is to gain time for successive military reinforcements to land.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

COLONIAL OFFICE,
2 *Sept.* 1899.

Confidential.

MY DEAR MILNER— . . . This afternoon I have suggested a Cabinet to Lord Salisbury to arrange for an ultimatum. . . . I hope you are satisfied by now that although in the light of information which is incomplete and of telegrams which are always inadequate to explain fully the meaning of the sender, I may occasionally differ from you, yet that I am in the fullest sense of the word loyal to you as I believe you are to me.

We have both a very difficult part to play and the atmosphere here is very different from that at Cape Town. Just consider how it strikes the ordinary patriotic Englishman. . . . He sees that if there is a war it will be a very big affair—the biggest since the Crimea—with no honour to be gained, if we are successful, and with many most unpleasant contingent possibilities. The technical *casus belli* is a very weak one and, thanks to past concessions and weaknesses, our hands are tied in regard to many matters which might otherwise be put forward to justify extreme action. In addition to this we are hampered by constitutional difficulties owing to the existence of an Afrikander Government at the Cape and

[1] Chamberlain to Lansdowne, August 24.

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the Dutch majority in the Colony. The fear of the after-consequences of a racial conflict is constantly present in the minds even of those most hostile to the Kruger regime.

Lastly our clients the Uitlanders, and the British in the Colonies, are not wholly without reproach. The former are unfortunately identified with money-making—with the Raid—and are not supposed to be capable of much self-sacrifice even for a holy cause—and the latter are quite too ready to take all the profits of a war in the shape of Imperial expenditure while doing nothing themselves but shouting on every occasion that they will cut the painter if the Imperial Government does not do everything they want and do it as quickly as they consider possible and desirable.

These things influence the outside politicians, but in addition we, who are inside, have other difficulties.

The War Office is not an ideal institution. The other day they were ready "to the last button"—now they talk of four months before they can put an Army Corps to the front. Of the Treasury I will say nothing since you were yourself an ornament of that great department—but I think the more.

When I reflect on all these things I am really astonished at the progress we have made. It is a great thing to say that the majority of the people have, as I believe, recognised that there is a greater issue than the franchise or the grievances of the Uitlanders at stake, and that our supremacy in S. Africa and our existence as a great Power in the world are involved in the result of our present controversy.

Three months ago we could not—that is, we should not have been allowed to—go to war on this issue. Now—although still most unwillingly and with a large minority against us—we shall be sufficiently supported.

But please bear all this in mind if we move more slowly than you think wise, and than would be wise if we only had Cape opinion to think of—or the interests of the British Empire in South Africa.

What is going to happen next? If the reply from the Transvaal is unsatisfactory I hope you will get a Report [on the conditions required to make the Transvaal franchise satisfactory] from your Commissioners in a very few days. . . .

Then shall we give Kruger one more chance by asking him to accept the Report and carry it out?

At present, I think we should. I can see clearly that the British at the

Cape and in Natal are afraid that if he accepts at the last moment he will do so with the intention of repudiating his obligations whenever we are otherwise engaged; and they would like us to increase our demands and send an ultimatum on other points such as Suzerainty, Disarmament, Federation, and I know not what, which would certainly force a war.

But can we do this yet? We must play out this game *selon les règles* and it seems to me to-day that we ought to exhaust the franchise proposals and get a clear refusal before, on the principle of the Sibylline books laid down by Lord Salisbury, we ask for more.

If and when we ask for more it means war, and therefore, before we do this, we must have a sufficient force in South Africa to defend ourselves during the time that will be required to get a full fighting force into the country, and besides this we must have parliamentary sanction for the despatch of a large force, which means discussion, some division of opinion and delay. . . .

"If and when we ask for more it means war." Four days after this was written he received from the High Commissioner the news that the Boers had withdrawn their conditional offer of a five-years franchise—which had become an unconditional British stipulation—and showed no disposition towards speedy agreement.[1] It was the deadlock.

V

Nothing remained for the British Government but to present the Transvaal with the alternative of "Reform or War", and to make ready in earnest for refusal and the trial of strength in South Africa. Chamberlain threw all his cogency into his memorandum circulated before the Cabinet met. Its main theme is that the franchise question is superseded, and that far graver issues are raised:

What is now at stake is the position of Great Britain in South Africa —and with it the estimate formed of our power and influence in the Colonies and throughout the world. . . . Everyone, natives included, sees that issue has been joined, and that it depends upon the action

[1] Milner to Chamberlain, September 5 (received next day). See preceding chapter on the political negotiations. C.9521, p. 52.

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of the British Government now whether the supremacy, which we have claimed so long, and so seldom exerted, is to be finally established and recognised or for ever abandoned.

He drew the moral for action:

> I think that the time has fully come when the troops in South Africa should be largely reinforced, and I feel that the most serious responsibility will rest upon the Government if, owing to want of proper preparation, reverses should be suffered by the British forces, or British Colonies should be invaded and British troops have to fall back.[1]

In the Cabinet held on Friday, September 8, his determination carried the day on the military side as on the political.[2] The discussion, as he noted, "disclosed no differences of opinion on any important point". Next morning it was known everywhere that Her Majesty's Government had decided to reinforce the defence of Natal by 10,000 men chiefly from India and the Mediterranean stations. By contrast with the War Office at home the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, had promised "efficient speed" on behalf of the Indian army, and signally was that promise fulfilled.

Lord Wolseley now staked his reputation that when the Indian and other reinforcements arrived, raising the total strength of our regular troops in South Africa to about 22,000 men, our defensive position would be unbreakable.

Chamberlain returned to Highbury for one more week of relative quiet and tried to interest himself in the beginnings of the new "pleasaunce" he had begun to work at in his grounds,[3] but his mind was at a stretch. On Sunday evening, September 17, he received Kruger's refusal of the British Government's "final offer". He returned to town next day. He judged that this boded the end of peace in South Africa. The large majority of the nation judged the same. On Wednesday, for the first time, he avows—to Eckardstein—his belief that the Boers have made peaceful ways impossible and war inevitable.[4]

[1] "J. C.", September 6, 1899.

[2] Dispatch of September 8 conveying the "final offer" of Her Majesty's Government. For the terms see pp. 442-443 above.

[3] The "pleasaunce", designed by himself, was to be enclosed within a beech-hedge with a formal garden at one end and a free garden at the other.

[4] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 395 (September 20).

VI

Would the next Friday's Cabinet face the same conclusion, and its military implications, without further dallying? It did not seem so sure. In truth the Colonial Secretary's chief anxiety is the Prime Minister, whose mood is a curious psychological study. Like some other Ministers he desired to gain time until the defensive reinforcements could arrive in Natal; and so was inclined to temporise in the next diplomatic dispatch and to postpone mobilisation of the army corps. Chamberlain called this "an absolutely fatal and, I think, an impossible policy". In the correspondence between the two men there is a slight rasping of blades, but as usual discretion prevails.

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

September 18.—I agree with you that the reply is most unsatisfactory and that we must prepare for war as the most probable alternative. But I do not quite go with you in the matter of pace. Arthur Balfour dwelt on this point very earnestly at the last Cabinet, and I quite agreed with him. I am not at all confident of our power to hold the exposed points in Natal with our present force, especially if we have the Free State against us, as seems probable now. Therefore we should do nothing to precipitate an attack until our reinforcements arrive, which may be five weeks hence. . . . I can summon the Cabinet when you please; but following the same line of thought I should not shew any symptom of urgent haste yet. . . .

The trenchant temperament answered:

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

September 18.—I should certainly like a Cabinet as early as you think it can possibly be summoned.

I am sorry to say that I did not agree with Arthur Balfour's views though I appreciate the object he has in view, which is, as I understand it, to get the whole of our last ordered reinforcements into Africa before we make a move which may cause the Boers to take the offensive.

I recognise that, thanks to the imperfect information of the War Office, we may be in a position of some risk so far as outlying places

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are concerned, but I do not think we shall lessen this by waiting five weeks before announcing our decision.

I do not see how we are to play with the Boers during this time. If they mean to take advantage of our weakness they will move[1] before the Indian troops arrive.

On the other hand I am aghast at the idea of leaving this country and, above all, South Africa in the slightest doubt as to the intentions of the Government.

It would in my judgment be an absolutely fatal and I think an impossible policy, but perhaps I have misunderstood your meaning, and I should be very glad to consult you personally. Of course I would come to Hatfield at any time if it would be more convenient to you—or see you whenever you are at the F.O. if you think that would make less fuss.

To equip himself for the argument that had to be fought out immediately, Chamberlain questioned Cape Town. "If reserves are now called out and Parliament summoned to approve, would Boers take offensive and anticipate arrival of reinforcements? If so, what harm could they do, and where attack?" Milner cabled back that the risk must be faced; that further delay would be worse; that the danger of immediate attack by the Boers already existed. If the Orange Free State joined, the Boers might attempt to rush Natal and raise a Cape rebellion. Communication with the North might be cut and Mafeking and Kimberley invested.[2]

With these opinions in his hand—and further news that the Orange Free State seemed certain to join—Chamberlain was well prepared for the meeting of Ministers on Friday, September 22. This Cabinet left him "quite satisfied", and might well. How the "interim dispatch", foreshadowing though postponing an ultimatum, was concocted has been shown fully in earlier pages.[3] But also the mobilisation of the army corps was to begin at once without obtrusiveness. Some Ministers had thought it safer to put off mobilisation for several weeks more, but Chamberlain prevailed, to his rare relief. The spirit of this Cabinet was stronger than the words of an "interim dispatch", which could only

[1] As they did, though not rapidly enough.

[2] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. pp. 540-541 (Milner to Chamberlain, September 19).

[3] See preceding chapter, pp. 444-449.

be a lull before the storm. That same evening he telegraphed the weighty news to relieve likewise the mind of the High Commissioner:

Secret and Personal.—September 22 (cyphered and sent 7.20 P.M.).—Cabinet unanimous and resolved to see matter through. All preparations for expeditionary force will be proceeded with as quickly as possible but without public announcement at present. Our proposal for settlement will be agreed on by Cabinet next week, and if forwarded by mail will allow four weeks' interval for reinforcements which are now on the way to arrive. Parliament need not meet nor reserves be called out till middle October.

It was one of the heaviest weeks for body and mind he had known. At Highbury next day, one of his racking headaches forced him to bed, and he slept nearly sixteen hours.

VII

At this point occurs a footnote to history on a matter often since the subject of conjecture. What were the intended terms of a British ultimatum? To the Cabinet Chamberlain already had submitted the first incomplete draft. The document, subjected to the written criticisms of his colleagues, was several times revised in some details and phrases. In its final shape, read and approved by the Queen, it differed little from the Colonial Secretary's first draft.

The demands Chamberlain was authorised to make in the name of Her Majesty's Government were seven:

THE PROPOSED BRITISH ULTIMATUM—
THE SEVEN POINTS

1. Repeal of all legislation since 1881 prejudicing the position of Uitlanders, who at that time could obtain equal rights of citizenship after one year's residence. The Uitlanders likewise to be assured of representation in some reasonable proportion to their numbers; and of the right to use their own language in the Legislature and the Law Courts.

2. Full municipal rights for the mining districts.

3. Guarantees for the independence of the Courts of Justice.

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4. Removal of religious disabilities.

5. A Tribunal of arbitration excluding any foreign element.

6. "The concession of most-favoured-nation rights to Great Britain, not only in commercial matters but in all matters affecting British interests or the position of British subjects, whether white or coloured."

7. "The provisions of the Treaty with Portugal, allowing the passage of arms through Portuguese territory, to be surrendered, and an agreement to be arrived at with Her Majesty's Government for the reduction of the excessive armaments of the South African Republic."

Equally important, though an assurance to the Boers not a demand, is what follows. "If these conditions are agreed to, Her Majesty's Government will still be prepared to give a complete guarantee against any attack upon the independence of the South African Republic, either from within any part of the British Dominions or from the territory of a foreign State." And this assurance was no mockery. Regarding franchise and redistribution Her Majesty's Government was still ready to arrange such safeguards as would prevent the old burghers from being immediately swamped by the new population.[1] So far was Chamberlain, on the very eve of war, from being a rabid jingo towards the Boers, or a predatory Imperialist bent on crushing Republics to grab gold-mines.

Conspicuous as showing how the vital question had become one of "Armaments and Security" was the seventh demand. The Cabinet at Lord Salisbury's own suggestion had sharpened this to the point of summoning the Transvaal alone to disarm.[2] Chamberlain preferred mutual limitation. He did not contemplate keeping a large British force permanently in South Africa to overawe the Dutch. But the *exposé* preceding the demand recited that the Transvaal had "enormously increased its armaments until it is believed that there is a provision sufficient for four or five times the number of burghers liable to bear arms". Milner, as we saw a few pages back, had for long represented that any British ultimatum must deal with Boer armaments. He called it "the gravest feature" of the whole South African situation.

[1] October 9, 1899. Final draft for the Cabinet.

[2] Chamberlain to Lansdowne, October 1, 1899.

The original intention was to send the Seven Demands by mail steamer, so that they might be presented to Pretoria towards the end of October, when Natal, according to the military consensus, would be safe. Chamberlain's ultimatum was never dispatched because the Boers anticipated it by their own.

VIII

For months past the Boer junta had reckoned in dead earnest with the likelihood of war. More heavy shipments of weapons and ammunition had arrived. Distribution of rifles and cartridges continued throughout the two Republics and there were full stocks in reserve. The burghers were ready to mount at a moment's notice. In a few days the mobilised commandos could cross the frontiers. Pretoria was rightly proud of the artillery. Fighting enthusiasm filled the younger men and confidence was defiant. At Pretoria itself the atmosphere had been surcharged with militant feeling for weeks before the final resolve to do it, and do it quickly.

Chamberlain's "interim dispatch"[1]—the "pen-ultimatum" of the wits—with the decision to send out an army corps, determined the Transvaal Government to launch the conflict. The dispatch was handed to President Kruger on Monday, September 25, when he was already well informed of British military measures. If he meant to take up arms rather than surrender to any coming ultimatum demanding redress for the Uitlanders and asserting British predominance, the hour of decision had struck. Considering the militant fervour and religious conviction of the burghers there could be no doubt about the nature of the decision. The Boers possessed as yet in South Africa a fighting advantage of a unique kind and it might be doubled by prompt and daring action—sweeping down on Natal from the heights; raising the Dutch in the northern half at least of Cape Colony; seizing the wide-apart railway junctions in that direction; so as to confront the British everywhere with one of the most difficult problems of advance in the history of war. They thought it would be suicide to wait.

On the very day when the interim dispatch was received at

[1] Of September 22. See p. 447 above.

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Pretoria the temper of the majority of the burghers in both Republics was expressed by one of them who was brother to President Steyn's State Secretary:

> *September* 25, 1899.— . . . The only thing we are afraid of now is that Chamberlain, with his admitted fitfulness of temper, will cheat us out of the war, and consequently the opportunity of annexing the Cape Colony and Natal, and forming the Republican United States of South Africa; for . . . we have 46,000 fighting men who have pledged themselves to die shoulder to shoulder in defence of our liberty, and to secure the independence of South Africa.[1]

Pretoria decided for audacity. The Old Man steeled his own heart. As for his young bloods nothing could hold them back now. They were "spoiling for a fight", as one of them said long afterwards. On September 27 Kruger telegraphed to Steyn: "Executive unanimous that commando order should be issued to-day. We beg you will also call out your burghers. As war is unavoidable we must act at once and strongly." For a couple of days at Bloemfontein the weaker man hesitated. Kruger telegraphed again (September 29): "You still seem to think of peace but I consider it impossible. I am strongly of opinion that your people ought also to go to border to take positions: you think Chamberlain is leading us into a trap but if we wait longer our cause may be hopelessly lost and that would be our trap."[2] Full of misgivings Steyn bent to the pressure, and called out his burghers, while still carrying on useless expostulations with Milner.

For weeks past British Uitlanders had been streaming away from the Transvaal. At Johannesburg the exodus now became a frantic stampede. At Pretoria intense military activity caused wild excitement. Large crowds watched the frequent departure of packed troop-trains carrying men, munitions, horses. Batteries of artillery clanked through the streets. British witnesses were surprised, like the British army later, by the number of large-calibre guns now moving.

While these sights were seen in the Transvaal, elsewhere in South Africa feeling was riven. Of both Houses of the

[1] Cd. 420, 1900, p. 86.
[2] *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. i. pp. 358-360.

Cape Parliament fifty-eight Afrikander members, including the Ministers, urged Her Majesty's Government to fall back on joint enquiry; while fifty-three Progressive members appealed for unwavering British resolve. The Colonial Secretary replied to each section. He thanked the Progressives briefly for their support. In considerate language he assured the Afrikanders—what was particularly true for him—that the British Government had never been other than sympathetic towards the Queen's Dutch subjects; that the main object had been to secure racial equality in the Transvaal as at the Cape; but that reversion to joint enquiry was no longer possible.

IX

In London the last pre-war Cabinet sat on Friday, September 29, little realising as yet the war-heat in the Transvaal, the celerity of its mobilisation, its management of artillery, or that about twenty crowded troop-trains in succession had already left Pretoria. The Cabinet approved Chamberlain's drafted ultimatum to Pretoria and still contemplated its speedy dispatch. It was decided to summon Parliament for October 17.

The Governor of Natal telegraphed to the Colonial Secretary that railway traffic had been stopped on the Transvaal frontier, that the telegraph was cut; and that Boer commandos were gathering near the high pass Laing's Nek, giving entrance into the colony. The Governor, none the less, shared the view of the War Office at home: "Ominous as the signs are, I cannot think that the Boers will be so crack-brained as to strike the first blow at us".[1]

But by now the High Commissioner's wakeful instinct was confirmed by sure information and he began to telegraph the truth to an incredulous Government. The Boers would take the initiative and assail the British Empire. Pretoria and Bloemfontein were anxious to know the terms of Chamberlain's ultimatum in order to strengthen their own—already drawn up—by charging him with the great aggression. Milner advised urgently that the British Government should hold back its

[1] Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson (by letter) to the Colonial Secretary, September 29, 1899.

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ultimatum—"as events of next few days may supply us with a better one than anybody can compose".[1]

On October 2 the Raad approved war and adjourned. It was an earnest and moving scene. Many members were already with their commandos on the Natal frontier. President Kruger adjured his hearers to "read Psalm 108, verse 7, which came to my mind while I was struggling in prayer".[2] "God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice. I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth." Burghers who consulted that verse would hardly miss the next but one: "Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph". Other accounts say, however, that the Old Man invoked rather, and it seems more apt, verse seven of Psalm 118: "The Lord taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me".

So far Chamberlain, though he had said that war was inevitable, had not lost all hope in his heart that the Boers might think better of it. Now as he saw it, they were rushing on their ruin. Through the last week of peace hollow parleys went on between Cape Town and Bloemfontein on President Steyn's initiative. He was not a free mediator. There was no light in his suggestion that British reinforcement should be renounced. In vain the Colonial Secretary offered through Milner an assurance that during negotiations the Republics would not be molested if they gave a reciprocal guarantee not to attack British territory. A last private letter to Cape Town before the crash shows a graphic realism:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

October 5.— . . . The present is a very anxious moment for me as it must also be for you. . . . Matters have come to such a pitch that unless there is a complete surrender on the part of the Boers, either as the result of agreement or of war, we shall never again be able to put forward any demands for redress of any grievances however great. The people of England will not provide an armament of fifty or sixty thousand men at an expense of five or more millions every time the Boers pass a Bill that we do not like. . . . I see that you who are on the spot and ought

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. i. p. 552 (Milner to Chamberlain, September 29).

[2] *Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, vol. ii. p. 434.

to know better than I are convinced that the Boers will begin. Of course if they do they will materially lessen the political difficulty. . . .

Every provision for the army corps is now going on as rapidly as possible. The real sticking point of the whole business was the necessity for purchasing an enormous number of mules. I believe the orders given amount to more than a million sterling, and of course the animals have to be raked up in all parts of the world. It is unfortunate that our troops, unlike the Boers, cannot mobilise with a piece of biltong and a belt of ammunition but require such enormous quantities of transport and impedimenta. . . .

These were the closing days of his first phase of power in the Dual Ministry. It had now lasted over four years. It had seen a total alteration both in the general conditions and personal forces of home and Imperial politics. In the Cabinet as well as the country he was stronger now than the Prime Minister, and sometimes stronger than all his colleagues together.

X

Before the next phase begins we must take a glimpse of him in his manifold activities. He had the West Indies on his mind; he had on his hands the brunt of Anglo-German negotiations over Samoa, and was bringing that sullen quarrel to a settlement. Cypher messages about South Africa pursued him continually until late in the night and sometimes haled him out of bed.

Yet he pursued devotedly his public and private efforts to complete the creation of Birmingham University; went on at moments with the laying-out of his "pleasaunce" at Highbury, lamenting in jest that he could not exchange politics for landscape gardening; disturbed himself vehemently, like most of his countrymen, about the rights and wrongs of the Dreyfus case still distracting France. Staunch not only to living friendship but to its memories, he took the trouble to write privately to the High Commissioner a long and warm recommendation of a young man whose acquaintance he recently had made—one Winston Churchill.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

Colonial Office, October 5, 1899.—I am sending a line to anticipate a probable visit from Winston Churchill, the son of Lord Randolph

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> Churchill, who is going out as correspondent for the *Morning Post*. I have declined to give any introductions to you to newspaper correspondents, and I do not introduce Churchill as such, but only as the son of my old friend to whom I should be glad at any time to do a kindness. He is a very clever young fellow with many of his father's qualifications. He has the reputation of being bumptious, but I have not myself found him so, and time will no doubt get rid of the defect if he has it. . . . He is a good writer and full of energy. He hopes to be in Parliament, but want of means stands in the way. If, when he comes, you can help him with any introductions to people who will put him on the right lines I shall be very much obliged. . . .

The war correspondents, we see, were on the way or already present at what would be called by inherited usage at that time, "the theatre of war".

The Governor of Natal himself telegraphed to Chamberlain on October 7 that "the Boers have not come in yet", and he still doubted whether they would. If they did? At any moment now Durban, looking out to sea, might hail the first Indian troopship on the horizon. Chamberlain could not believe in the ability of the Boers to strike first and with success. But the High Commissioner for his part had learned much in a few days. Too long, no doubt, had he been influenced by the fixed notion of most of the British, including Rhodes—even the fate of the Raid could not change this almost childish touch in so big a mind—that at the pinch Kruger would "climb down". Rhodes had proclaimed roundly: "I will say that there is not the slightest danger of war". And again, "The armed strength of the Boers is the greatest unpricked bubble in the world".[1] And so forth. Now Milner's own instinct became more penetrating. He took a darker view of immediate prospects. His military men told him, for instance, that Mafeking was too lonely to be saved.

Even statesmen who had kept the coolest minds up to now thought Milner's nerves were frayed. By the close of the last week of peace—when it seemed almost certain that the Indian contingent would reach Natal in time—they supposed that all would go well. Adopting War Office optimism like the rest Chamberlain turned as over-confident as anyone. "I am afraid

[1] E. T. Cook, *Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War*, p. 295.

Milner has been 'scared' about Natal and Mafeking. Personally I felt sure that the Boers would not cross at this stage—and that if they did they would almost certainly find a British garrison in its own fortified position a very hard nut to crack." This from the Colonial Minister to the War Minister just before the event. Wrong of course, like all the rest of them, about the force of Boer spirit. Right about the fibre of British garrisons whether at Mafeking, Kimberley or Ladysmith.

Rapidly as the Transvaal burghers themselves had assembled, they found chaos instead of organisation at their front, and had been hindered for a week. This before a shot had been fired robbed them of their best hope. The delay averted that disastrous effect which a triumphant sweep through Natal might have created in Cape Colony, where Pretoria expected 40,000 Dutch Afrikanders to rise. At home, on Saturday, October 7, a Royal Proclamation called out the army reservists. They numbered only 25,000 men, but it seemed no small event in the England of that day. On Sunday, October 8, the Indian troops reached Durban just in the very nick of time.

XI

Next day, Monday, October 9, Chamberlain in a resilient mood travelled from Highbury to London. All Natal made safe as was presumed, the British ultimatum containing the Seven Demands was to be telegraphed through the High Commissioner to Pretoria within the next forty-eight hours. That night Chamberlain went to bed as late as usual, little dreaming that President Kruger's own more sweeping ultimatum was already loosed. At a quarter-past six next morning, the Colonial Secretary was awakened for a reason brooking no delay. A dispatch of many sheets was put into his hands. As he came towards the end of it he could hardly believe his eyes and sat up amazed. President Kruger demanded, as before five o'clock next day, the submission of Queen Victoria's Government to divers demands; and amongst them these three:

1. "That the troops on the borders of this Republic shall be instantly withdrawn.

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2. "That all reinforcements of troops which have arrived in South Africa since June 1, 1899, shall be removed from South Africa within a reasonable time to be agreed upon with this Government.

3. "That Her Majesty's troops which are now on the high seas shall not be landed in any port in South Africa."[1]

Chamberlain exclaimed, "They have done it!" For a Boer choice of war at the pinch he was fully prepared; but this mode of declaration was almost unbelievable good fortune. On the strength of their real armed paramountcy, and real racial suzerainty, in South Africa, the Boers claimed to sweep Imperial influence out of it. To understand that moment we must remember that there was then a living and a thrilling power in some national traditions and attachments, emotions and expressions, which are now cold or vanished. It was the Queen who was ordered to reduce her exiguous garrisons to a derisory footing; forbidden to land troops anywhere in her South African territories; summoned to accept in effect the domination of the Transvaal Republic over an extensive portion of her Empire.

From the War Office Lord Lansdowne sent over a note to the Colonial Office, "Accept my felicitations. I don't think Kruger could have played your cards better than he has. . . . My soldiers are in ecstasies." The same evening at a quarter to eleven by the clock, after a long day's work, the Colonial Secretary sent to the High Commissioner the British rejoinder:

October 10, *No.* 8.—Her Majesty's Government have received with great regret the peremptory demands of the Government of the South African Republic conveyed in your telegram of 9th October, No. 3. You will inform the Government of the South African Republic in reply that the conditions demanded by the Government of the South African Republic are such as Her Majesty's Government deem it impossible to discuss.[2]

Next day, Wednesday, the Orange Free State, which had no grievance of its own, declared formally for the Transvaal.[3] On Thursday, October 12, the struggle began. On one side the Boers entered Natal; on the other side they captured an armoured

[1] C.9530, October 9, 1899, pp. 65-67. [2] *Ibid.* p. 68. [3] *Ibid.* p. 69.

train at a point south of Mafeking, a place still unrenowned and already given up for lost by Milner's military advisers.

From Pretoria issued the flaming appeal to all Afrikanders to rise against "treaty-breakers and robbers" and to create "a Free United South Africa". It had been the heart's aim of the Old Man—he had just celebrated his seventy-fourth birthday—who could look far back to the Great Trek and to the hunting days when he amputated his own thumb. He and many enthusiasts, both at Pretoria and Bloemfontein and in the Colony, expected in truth a glorious issue after suffering. The Republics had arms and ammunition for nearly 80,000 men and counted upon a Cape rising to make up that number and complete the Afrikander Triple Alliance. The conditions of space, surface and mobility would tax a British force of several times that number. The real bases of the British were thousands and thousands of miles away. How could they cope with him? The 83rd Psalm and 108th—or was it the 118th?—promised wonders to God's people. Also, the flight of bullets was ordered by the Lord and he turned them away from the righteous.[1]

This mystical language might have been addressed with pure heroism or pathos to a pastoral folk struggling for nothing but its own separate freedom. Instead, Boer rule over the Uitlander majority was a cause much too mixed and doubtful to be described in terms of Biblical or poetic idealism. It was an impossible anomaly. To-day no one would wish to see its like restored anywhere in the world.

On that head Sir Henry de Villiers, an Afrikander who lacked no sympathy with his own race and did not love the Colonial Secretary, seems to give the judgment of Daniel:

> I confess I look with horror on a war to be fought by Afrikanders to bolster up President Kruger's regime. I could understand a war in defence of the South African Republic after it has made reasonable concessions to the demands of the new-comers, and after it has displayed the same desire to secure good government as is seen in the Orange Free State; but of such a desire I have not seen the faintest trace. . . .[2]

The same witness was amongst those who, when advocating

[1] *Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, vol. ii. p. 434 (the President's address to the Raads, October 2, 1899).

[2] Cd. 369, 1900, pp. 5-6 (De Villiers to Fischer of the Orange Free State, September 28, 1899).

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retrocession after Majuba, insisted on preserving the Queen's suzerainty; and he maintained that "The real cause of all the subsequent trouble was the substitution of the 1884 Convention without inserting the suzerainty from the 1881 Convention".[1]

XII

The ironists of the time who knew the Rand were right when they said that the real origins of the Boer War were primarily geological. But for the auriferous deposits the Uitlander population would not have arisen. But even the geological factor and its social consequences might not have led to convulsion but for the personalities of Rhodes and Kruger existing in the same sub-continent. After the Jameson Raid, not authorised by Rhodes but springing from the imitative arrogance spread amongst his adherents, the atmosphere of South Africa was poisoned by racial prejudice and suspicion. Kruger was presented with every advantage for his policy of obduracy and armaments.

Worst of all, the burghers of both Republics and the Dutch throughout South Africa believed, like most of the British, what was the reverse of the truth—that the Colonial Secretary and Rhodes were secret accomplices. The Boers little knew, what these pages have shown again and again, that there was neither liking nor affinity between Chamberlain and Rhodes, and that the latter, after the Raid, never had a shadow of influence upon the acts or words of the Imperial Government. Again, Chamberlain had none of the bitterness towards the Cape Dutch created in Milner's mind by the atmosphere of race antagonism wherein he lived.

But in view of the other factors neither must it be said that Milner made the war. At no point were the conclusions of the Cabinet decided by Milner's personal feeling, regarded with caution by all the chief Ministers and by some with distaste. The High Commissioner's strength lay in the energy of his conviction that Kruger's system of super-armament and racial rule would and must make peace impossible unless the Boers yielded to an ultimatum backed by an army.

[1] October 6, 1899. Eric A. Walker, *Lord de Villiers*, p. 180, footnote.

"From the first day I came into office, I hoped for peace; I strove for peace." So Chamberlain exclaimed in that great vindication we shall come to when Parliament meets. His word is true. Through nearly eighteen months before the last arbitrament he had laid down and enforced a policy regarded by the High Commissioner as too mild and too long-suffering. But also, right through, Chamberlain knew what he was about and knew what he would do if his hopes should fail. At the end, he would have cast the iron dice—had not Kruger cast first—because he had been forced to the conclusion that the whole British position was challenged in South Africa and would be lost at no very distant time if not now at all costs maintained.

We must shake off altogether the routine of thought in our day and try to realise conditions and influences in the mid-autumn of 1899, which no doubt are hard to recall. General themes of adverse comment in the world at that time were Britain's isolation, the military insignificance of her small army raised upon a hire-system, her democratic dissensions, the supposed degeneracy of her street-bred mass, the insufficiency of sea-power to cope anywhere with territorial perils, the precariousness and jeopardy of the British Empire. The Dutch press in South Africa, like most of the press throughout continental Europe, explained that the Germans were the virile people and the rising power, that Tsarist Russia's advance in China and towards India was an irresistible process, that France at the first good opportunity would spring to avenge Fashoda, that in spite of some plausible sentiments there was latent hostility between the British and American peoples; that in the United Kingdom itself most of the Liberal Opposition as well as all the Irish Opposition would be effective friends of the Transvaal.

At Pretoria a chief confidant of the Executive wrote: "The fall of England shall be the crown of the end of the nineteenth century".[1] It was certain enough that if we became involved with one or more of the Great Powers the Boers would strike at us. They themselves hoped, despite Germany's official neutrality, that the nature of the fight they meant to wage would rouse

[1] No less a person than Van Kretschmar, managing director of the Netherlands Railway, whose important part in the war organisation went far beyond transport duties. See E. T. Cook, *Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War*, p. 302, footnote; and C.625, p. 57.

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foreign intervention. President Kruger sent his message to the *New York Herald*: "The Republics are determined if they must belong to England that a price will have to be paid which will stagger humanity". No more than his colleagues or the soldiers did Chamberlain foresee that sequel, but his belief stood that as in South Africa the Empire was at stake, the Empire would rally to maintain it. When, on the very day of his laconic answer to the Boer ultimatum, the New South Wales Lancers rode through the City of London, he felt in that moment of his career as Colonial Minister a significance bringing his life to a climax. As messages of approval and pledges of support flowed in from all the Queen's dominions overseas, he kindled with pride and faith, and with hopes reaching beyond this struggle towards South African Federation and a wider aim.

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CHAPTER LXVIII

NO "LITTLE WAR"—CHAMBERLAIN AND THE NATION —OPTIMISM AND FIRST WARNINGS

(1899)

CHEERS and Mobilisation—Foreign Opinion and "Chamberlain's War"—Boer Over-Confidence exceeds British—Assembly of Parliament—The Short War Session—Unmeasured Attacks on the Colonial Secretary—His Great Defence—He speaks for two hours and three-quarters—A Personal Triumph—The War begins to go wrong—"Nicholson's Nek" and British Determination—But Victory by Christmas still expected—The Transvaal and Delagoa Bay—A Secret Agreement with Portugal—The Anglo-German Problem unsolved.

I

THE few days before the opening of the session rang with the bruit of war. The country was concerned as not for more than forty years with entraining of troops and time-tables of troopships. Confidence was too facile for excitement to be felt; the profound emotion of later months was not yet known. Lord Rosebery enhanced his national influence, but inflamed Liberal dissensions, when he proclaimed at once that no British Government could now repeat the policy followed after the reverse of Majuba Hill. Cheers for Chamberlain were called for at patriotic meetings. "Rule Britannia" was in request, but ordinary feeling was better expressed by a music-hall refrain of the day: "We're not going to stand it".

Whole pages of the newspapers were full of the military preparations. All over the country the reservists were answering punctually the call to the colours. Mobilisation worked without a hitch, so that in a few days the first brigades of the strongest army that ever had left the island would be ready to embark for

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its destination over six thousand miles away. An immense crowd cheered Sir Redvers Buller when he left Southampton with his staff. He was regarded by nearly everyone as Britain's massive imperturbable soldier; just as the army corps was called in the language both of the populace and the clubs, the "steam-roller" —to flatten out the Boers if they had not been routed before it arrived.

Neither in its own character nor in its further effect upon national movements, Imperial affairs or world-policy was this struggle to count as a little war. So far from being anything like a little war in the ordinary sense, the South African conflict absorbed the world's attention. No war had ever roused more widely the agitation and the passions of mankind.

In a large part of Europe—especially in France, Germany and Russia—as amongst the Boers themselves, it was called "Chamberlain's War". Amongst many nations abroad it completely overshadowed for a time their domestic affairs. Many foreign military critics were more prescient than our own. The German *Militär-Wochenblatt* estimated at the outset that Britain, to come within sight of victory, would have to marshal in South Africa at least 150,000 men—or over three times the weight of the army corps expected by the British people and the War Office to operate like a steam-roller.

Such estimates were considered malicious. But, should they prove right, the task ahead would demand from the home island the largest military effort in our annals up to then, and a continued achievement of maritime transport over an ocean's length never performed in history. Whether the untested British democracy at the end of the nineteenth century would be capable of the exertion and endurance required, foreign thinkers not wholly blinded by prejudice might well doubt.

In these first days Milner telegraphed to the Colonial Secretary that his communications to the North were cut. Already Kimberley and Mafeking were surrounded, but Ladysmith was not thought to be in jeopardy. Where the northern wedge of Natal ran up into the higher mountains commandos of the two Republics were closing on that vulnerable and coveted territory. But British opinion, military and lay, continued to flatter itself that even in this quarter the Boers would not stand a

chance against regular troops in position. Rhodes reported from Kimberley that it was as safe as Piccadilly. There was nothing as yet in the South African reports to disturb the Colonial Secretary.

No less than British Imperialism Dutch racialism was possessed by over-confidence and delusions. It was even the more credulous of the two. The British dreamed of a jolly Christmas in Pretoria after a robust feat or two and a smooth progress. "The war will be over in a fortnight", said Chief Justice Gregorowski. "We shall take Kimberley and Mafeking and give the English such a beating in Natal that they will sue for peace." An Afrikander flag would wave, said Mr. Reitz, from the Zambesi to the Cape of Good Hope; the grand-daughter of George the Third, however bitter her necessity, would have to reconcile herself at last to the rise of another United States out of this similar war of independence. In European capitals, Dr. Leyds repeated President Kruger's opinion familar to us—that the Boers possessed arms and ammunition enough to last for three years.

Again we see that in some similarities of faults and qualities British and Dutch were still not unlike their ancestors in the seventeenth century, though in other ways they showed the widest difference of physical and mental type. Chamberlain, like many then in both Houses, well remembered the Alma and Inkerman, fought in the year when he first went to Birmingham. With no single battle as bloody as the Crimean grapples, the Boer War in its duration, proportions and consequences, was to exceed altogether the struggle with the Tsardom in the early-Victorian age.

II

Parliament assembled on Tuesday, October 17, a week after the rupture. The investment of Kimberley had just been completed, Mafeking was under fire, Joubert's commandos were pushing on through the Drakensberg into Natal.

The session to approve the war and vote supplies was to last only a few days. But the drama lacked nothing in intensity and one man whether acclaimed or abused would be its central figure. Chamberlain would be the target for unmeasured invective

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from the Radical and Irish benches. Not only so. Even the Liberal Imperialists who proclaimed the justice and necessity of the war, even those amongst them who supported Milner through thick and thin, were nearly all inimical to the Colonial Secretary. The Opposition might be riven by divisions and feuds —Harcourt and Morley might abjure Rosebery and Asquith, while as yet a shrewdly temporising leader, Campbell-Bannerman, could not satisfy either wing. But common antagonism to Chamberlain was their semblance of a bond.

On the other hand, Chamberlain had ample rewards. The spirit of the Empire overseas rallied to his cause and signalised his great Colonial administration. He held masterful and splendid position. Supported more ardently than ever before by the Unionist masses and more widely by the country at large, fortified by Liberal Imperialist argument whether they liked him or no, he recked little of all his enemies at home; but was bent to establish in debate his own lasting vindication.

When, on the first day of the session, equipped with his red box he appeared in the House of Commons, Unionist cheers rolled deep and many members pressed forward to shake his hand. Irish members groaned; Ulster gibed back through Colonel Saunderson, that if the Nationalist benches supported Kruger now, "Last time it was the Mahdi!"

Chamberlain against his will had to wait two days for his opportunity to make the speech that weighed upon his mind and nerves. He might well put every ounce of his capacity into an effort which would have to stand, like none of his before, not only contemporary judgment but the eye of posterity. Any powerful statesman vehemently accused by a minority at home and a majority abroad of responsibility for an avoidable war must leave on record his historic defence. Accustomed still to make concentrated preparation for critical occasions in speaking, this time we may say that he took exhaustive pains. For several nights running he sat up until two and three o'clock arming himself against all likely emergencies of debate.

There is no place in war-time for dialectical ingenuity. The practical weakness of the bulk of Opposition in both Houses was that they approved the energetic prosecution of this War but condemned more or less the Ministers charged with its conduct.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's speech on the Address was typical. By the terms of the Boer ultimatum and by the invasion of British territory, the war no doubt was rendered absolutely necessary. But the Colonial Secretary had bluffed and bungled.

Too mild for the Liberal Left were these sentiments. An amendment asserting "strong disapproval of the conduct of the negotiations with the Government of the Transvaal" was moved by Philip Stanhope, Member for Burnley. This aristocratic Radical, of a type once familiar but now almost extinct, was a person of almost excessively righteous countenance, but of normal manners except when as by optical derangement he saw the Colonial Secretary as Satan in a frock-coat—just as Foxites of a similar type saw Mr. Pitt.[1]

Mr. Stanhope, keeping within the bounds of verbal propriety, accused Chamberlain of dishonesty and dishonour. Was he not guilty of complicity in the Jameson Raid and worse? Had he not plotted the war? "I say that the Right Hon. Gentlemen the Colonial Secretary and Sir Alfred Milner, in conjunction with Mr. Rhodes and his associates, have for the last two years made up their minds that war, and war only, could be the termination of this crisis, and they have worked with that conviction for the last twelve or fourteen months."[2] For perfect falsity stated with perfect conviction this accusation never has been exceeded by personal animosity in politics with all its credulities of bitterness. Sir William Harcourt by contrast preserved the personal amenities, though he arraigned at length the conduct of the negotiations and particularly censured the Colonial Secretary for his supposed wanton revival of the word "Suzerainty" and for the Highbury speech with its metaphors about the running-out of hour-glasses and the squeezing of sponges.

III

Chamberlain moved the adjournment of the debate. Morally, despite complete practical dominance over the situation at

[1] "The passions of the vulgar made and kept Mr. Pitt minister; but the vulgar themselves are daily receiving proofs how little value they have got for their money, and that they are likely to obtain still less for the little which has been left to them". —Trotter's well-known *Memoirs of Charles James Fox*, pp. 5-6.

[2] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxvii. col. 188 (October 18).

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Westminster, he was on trial for his political life. How would he bear himself?

Next day (October 19), benches below and galleries above were more closely packed than for years past. Not another seat, said an eye-witness, was to be had anywhere for man or woman. Towards the end of question-time the place was curiously obscured by the darkness of an overcast afternoon. At the end of questions the warm artificial light suddenly flooded through the glass ceiling; a vivid scene sprang out of shadow; the aspect of the House was transformed in a moment and it looked equal to its memories. Just as this glow was thrown the Colonial Secretary was up; so pale at the table that his face stood out uncommonly amongst all the faces of the crowded Chamber. That pallor was his usual index of emotional intensity self-mastered to a degree that seemed to leave his brain more cool than at lesser times. He was full of suppressed feeling, sometimes of suppressed passion, but not for a moment in this long defence did accent, gesture or statement escape control. Throughout, as Dr. Johnson recommended, he spoke "strong and low". The force of the delivery was conveyed chiefly by that underswell of the voice which made Chamberlain most exciting when he was himself most restrained. In this peculiar quality there has never been a speaker like him so far as is known.

This effort was the longest of his own for many years and one of the longest since Gladstone's orations. Under his eye, like a small paper-parcel, was a thick wad of notes in his minute hand. Chamberlain rose a few minutes after four o'clock and sat down towards seven o'clock, having spoken for two hours and three-quarters.

Dealing first with the charges of complicity in the Raid and of deliberate blood-guiltiness, he excoriated Mr. Stanhope. The punishment became most pitiless when Chamberlain recalled how General Mercier recently had sworn upon his heart and conscience that he believed in the guilt of Dreyfus. So with the Member for Burnley. "What proof did the honourable Member give of this monstrous charge? Not one scrap, not one iota, not one fact, not one quotation. The whole thing is given to the House as an accusation—upon his heart and conscience." Nothing quite like the slow, savage scorn with which these latter

words were uttered stab by stab has since been heard in the House of Commons. With appeals to the Speaker and other interjections the aggressor quivered under the penalty.

After this preface, ruthless but fully provoked, the Colonial Secretary turned to the main theme he had to sustain and changed his key. With continuous terseness, point and order, in passages closely detailed yet reduced to the utmost simplicity of exposition and moderate in tone, he recapitulated the history of the Transvaal question. No one from that day to this seems to have judged that an abler statement from the pro-war standpoint could be supposed; nor could any degree of adverse conviction excel the force of his own. In former chapters of this volume the arguments and evidence concerned have been so thoroughly examined that we must not attempt here to summarise an effort which fills over twenty pages of Hansard and never flagged in the utterance.

Three points of his case will serve.

What he had worked for was to secure the equality of the two white races in South Africa and to uphold the paramountcy of the Crown. Suzerainty? The real causes of the war had nothing to do with etymological distinctions. "The Transvaal had become a few months ago by far the most powerful military State in Africa. Great Britain with all its resources could not stand up against her at that time. It was impossible." Many fervent Conservatives at home had thought him too pacifist, as we have seen, while his foes of the Opposition such as Stanhope, like Anglophobes abroad, accused him of working systematically, viciously, for war. That charge he met with a celebrated completeness:

> I say that having most carefully considered all the circumstances in the light of the most recent events—in the light of the ultimatum and in the light of the recent speeches of President Kruger and others—I have now come to the conclusion that war was always inevitable. It is a conclusion at which I have only recently and most reluctantly arrived. . . . From the first day I came into office I hoped for peace; I strove for peace. At that time and . . . down even to the most recent period, I have believed in peace. . . . Sir, have we ever been near peace? We have appeared to be near peace. . . . But is it not true, when we come to look

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at the whole situation, that always there have been cardinal differences; that there have been things which it was essential for us to demand and to obtain; and that those things President Kruger and his friends and advisers have always been determined not to grant? . . . I may have erred. You may ridicule my foresight; you may contemn my moderation; but you cannot deny that all this points to my intimate and anxious desire for that peaceful settlement which we have failed to secure.

The spirit of the closing passages must be condensed similarly into a few sentences:

I ask in all this long history which I have given, of facts, despatches and intentions, is there anywhere any sign of provocation, blood-guiltiness, desire for war or of a conspiracy to bring about war? . . . I am much more afraid of being told that I have been patient even to the point of weakness. . . . In our endeavour to maintain peace we have shown the utmost conciliation, we have shown endless patience. We have run some risk, but we have never from the first to the last for the sake of peace been prepared either to betray our countrymen or to allow the paramountcy, or whatever you call it, to be taken from us. President Kruger has settled the question; he has appealed to the God of battles, and I say with all reverence and gravity, we accept the challenge, believing that we have our quarrel just.[1]

It was a physical feat—and an argumentative performance though without rhetorical flights—not exampled in the House of Commons since Gladstone's time. A friendly spectator remarked that during the two hours and three-quarters Chamberlain took nothing to moisten his throat, not even a sip of water, though towards the end he seemed to slip a pellet between his lips. The present writer noted: "As the triumphant debater went on . . . Mr. Balfour beamed upon his colleague; Ministers in general embraced their knees with visible satisfaction; Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who had at first looked anxious, tried in the end not to look happy. . . . Of the rest [of the debate] nothing. There were other episodes but they are not in the picture. The sitting was a personal study with a single figure in the frame". Stanhope's amendment was rejected by 362 to 135

[1] For the whole speech with the interruptions see Hansard, Fourth Series, lxxvii., Oct. 19, cols. 254 *seq.*; also *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, edited by Charles W. Boyd, vol. ii. pp. 18-51.

—a majority of 227, not very far from double the ordinary Ministerial preponderance in the lobbies.

IV

To shape this vindication in advance both solidly and meticulously, yet to throw every fibre of himself into the delivery under forms of compression—this meant protracted strain. For once, by exception, the *tour de force* was not punished by neuralgia. Afterwards he was relaxed and well, relieved by the knowledge that his achievement was worthy of the intense exertion. *The Times* said that his manner of distinguishing between realities and shadows showed "the gift and mark of a statesman." A Conservative witness, by no means prone to compliment, expressed better than anyone else the feeling in the House of Commons and the country. "Mr. Chamberlain made a long and powerful speech in defence of himself and the Government—a speech in which he reached a higher level than he had before attained as statesman and as orator. It had an incalculable influence, reassuring the victims of honest doubt and steadying the opinion of the nation. . . ."[1] Private congratulations poured in. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, sent a word, "on your magnificent deliverance last night. You had a splendid case and you made the most of it". As leader of the House of Commons, Arthur Balfour reported to the Queen: "The principal feature of the proceedings was a very able and exhaustive defence by Mr. Chamberlain. In a speech of two hours and three-quarters he surveyed every criticism on the recent negotiations, answered Sir William Harcourt and pulverised Mr. Stanhope".[2] Lord James, always our best gossip of late years, was just then the Minister-in-waiting at Balmoral and gave a lively glimpse of the Queen's feelings.

FROM LORD JAMES AT BALMORAL

Balmoral Castle, October 20, 1899.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, . . . Your great effort last night. It was magnificent and real war also.

[1] H. Whates, who, without showy qualities, was one of the abler journalists of his time, and equal to any in sturdiness of character. The quotation is from his diligent volume, *The Third Salisbury Administration*, 1895–1900.

[2] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, edited by George Earl Buckle, Third Series, vol. iii. (last years, 1896–1901), p. 408.

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But I think it is more important you should know how much your speech was appreciated here. The first paper that arrives is the *Aberdeen Free Press*. It contained a very fair report (some five columns) of your speech.

Every word of this was at once read out and the criticism was "Very, very good: I am delighted with it". I thought this might interest you.

A few days later the Colonial Secretary excelled in another vein. Just before the House dispersed he was again loaded with comprehensive obloquy from the Radical and Irish benches, and he delighted the benches behind him by unruffled retort. He spoke on the "new diplomacy"—still the subject of inconclusive discussion though a generation has passed. Once more the Highbury warning at the garden-party had been denounced as one of the causes of the war.

In no sense . . . was it intended to be a provocative speech. It was intended to be a plain speech. It was intended to be a speech which nobody could misunderstand. . . . But no doubt there was a time when diplomacy proceeded on the principle of the maxim that language should be used to enable statesmen to conceal their thoughts, and if that may be fairly described as the old diplomacy I absolutely and entirely repudiate it.

He referred to the "pessimistic vaticinations" breathed in *The Times* by F. C. Selous, that mighty hunter and fascinating author of hunting books, who for years had known as well as any Englishman alive the Boers of the veldt. The Colonial Secretary agreed that any attempt to crush the Boers as a race would be ruinous to the Empire in South Africa. But who proposed to crush them? Not he.

Has it been our course in regard to any people? . . . Does anyone contend that the Dutch in Cape Colony are "crushed" by our rule? . . . Sir, does anybody imagine, whatever may be the result of the war, that we shall fail to do to others in this matter what we have claimed for ourselves—that we shall refuse as an ultimate settlement that equality of rights to the Dutch in the Transvaal which the Dutch in the Transvaal have denied to us?[1]

As yet the personal vendetta pursued by the anti-war party

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, lxxvii. cols. 645-657 (October 25).

only did him good and confirmed his hold on the nation. It seemed that his extreme enemies at this time were bombarding a pyramid with pop-guns. Through this ten days' session the Government commanded mighty majorities while Liberalism was wrenched asunder.

V

The Government's demands for men and money had been small, and soon seemed inept to a wrathful nation. The War Office asked for 35,000 additional troops; power was taken to embody the Militia Reserve, but as a precaution not likely to be required. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, estimated that £10,000,000 would cover the cost of the war and leave a margin. In the sequel twenty times that amount would not suffice. Parliament was prorogued on October 27. Within one week the country was forced to realise that severe vexations and disappointments might lie ahead, though it entered no one's notion that the struggle now beginning might stretch into its third year.

The British troops in high Natal had been confidently expected to hold their ground and more. But on the day before the Houses rose in London a retreating British force arrived at Ladysmith exhausted. We have noticed how the narrow northern triangle of Natal ran up perilously between the two overlooking Republics. General Penn Symons felt so capable of holding his own with his few thousand that instead of keeping the safer side of the Biggarsberg range pending reinforcement he had pushed across it to Glencoe and Dundee, so as to offer himself for envelopment to the enemy. Talana Hill (October 20) was a gallant action, but soon proved more a mistake than a success. Penn Symons fell mortally stricken. His successor, General Yule, secretly abandoning camp, stores and wounded, escaped from the trap by a hazardous march. Southward the line of retreat had been kept open in stirring style by General French's fight at Elandslaagte. The Natal forces were reunited under Sir George White at Ladysmith. But at the end of October the Boers, already laying siege to Kimberley and Mafeking, were fastening round Ladysmith.

Then came an episode of humiliation. It revealed for the

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first time the opening advantages of the Boers in numbers, position and local skill; but at the same time showed to any close observer that the psychology of the British people in this business had become set and dogged, and that obstacles would only harden their stubbornness. What was this episode? In the hope of breaking the Boer attempt to surround him, Sir George White with his 12,000 men—many of them amongst the best of the regular army—gave battle on October 30. He failed. The defeat would not have involved serious loss had it not been for a dismal fiasco at one point of the field. This was Nicholson's Nek, where a large British detachment hopelessly cut off had to hoist the white flag. Nearly 1000 officers and men were sent as prisoners to Pretoria. No less a man than Christian de Wet—of the "fierce eyes and keen determined face"—had made his mark.

In the present writer's recollection the most instructive day on the British side of all the War came with the news of Nicholson's Nek. Another Majuba, then, after all. This struggle might be very stiff. For years now, philosophic patriots had doubted whether the modern fibre of a street-bred democracy, never tested as yet by serious war, would maintain Pitt's tradition. The news was published on a grey raw day. In London people bought up the early editions of the evening journals. The placards caused the horse-omnibuses of those days to stop that passengers might buy the papers. There was neither noise nor gesture. The news was read, the journals were not flung down, but folded and kept; few men desired speech with their neighbours. It was certain from then, whatever this war might bring, that national will never would give in; and that if a crisis indefinitely greater were to arise in Europe the spirit of democratic Britain would be found not inferior to the spirit of the country at any time in its annals.

The mass of the nation felt that this was Chamberlain's spirit. He was the last man, for instance, to doubt the pith and manhood of the "street-bred democracy" of Birmingham. He could no more doubt theirs than his own. But his old distrust of the War Office system revived with bitterness. He still saw in Lord Roberts a greater man and soldier than Lord Wolseley. After Nicholson's Nek and the investment of Ladysmith he wrote to the Duke of Devonshire:

Do you remember Lansdowne telling us . . . that modern guns required elaborate platforms and mountings which took a year to consolidate? The Boers apparently find no difficulty in working their "Long Tom", without these elaborate preparations.

On the whole I am terribly afraid that our War Office is as inefficient as usual. . . .

I am all in favour of having another division, or even army corps, in preparation.[1]

Note that this was written long before the Black Week; and let us remember again that he had urged sending the first ten thousand to Natal two months before the Cabinet consented. After Nicholson's Nek, Ladysmith was isolated and bombarded. General French, soon to raise his name in another quarter, escaped by the last train south. Sir George White with 10,000 men, over 40 guns, and an immense quantity of stores was shut up by the burghers of the two Republics.

This "entanglement" destroyed the whole plan of campaign whereon the British Cabinet and the War Office had relied. The Colonial Secretary, like his colleagues, had imagined that the main British army, when all its divisions were disembarked in South Africa, would move resistlessly from Cape Colony through the Orange Free State to Pretoria. Buller landed at Capetown just after Ladysmith was shut in. Reports from Natal became black. The Boers foraying far south of the besieged town seemed to threaten the whole colony. More and more regiments were diverted to Durban. Presently the "army corps"—so called as a noun of number but never possessing trained cohesion—was broken up into several portions separated from each other by continental distances. On November 22 Buller himself abruptly left Cape Town to take command in the north. He abandoned the plan of advance through the open country of the Orange Free State, and went to confront the natural and military fortifications of Upper Natal.

Meanwhile the Colonial Secretary's telegrams informed him that some thousands of Boers were riding onwards through the heart of that colony. They were half-way between Ladysmith and the sea before the British reinforcements gathering in front

[1] Chamberlain to the Duke of Devonshire, November 5, 1899.

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caused them to turn back with their spoil of live-stock. When White was defeated and besieged—when the surrender was anticipated of the chief force of British troops as yet in South Africa—Free State contingents, urged by the younger bloods, broke across the Orange River with the dream of rousing the great rebellion of the Cape Dutch. The irruption failed to kindle that flame but as yet failure was not certain.

Though the "army corps" was disintegrated and Buller had left for Natal, Methuen was supposed to be left with ample strength for a victorious advance to Kimberley. There Rhodes, was insisting on relief "at once". Gatacre and French were counted on to recover the invaded part of northern Cape Colony. Buller, with almost automatic weight, was to carry the eastern approaches to the Transvaal, where the Tugela twisted across all the roads to Ladysmith, while beyond that river forbidding heights frowned down. In all three besieged towns the British, as of old, were tough and capable in defence. Taking all together it was still pictured at home that Kimberley very soon would be relieved by Methuen, whose fine column numbered nearly 10,000 men, including the Guards Brigade; that the Commander-in-Chief joining hands with the strong garrison of Ladysmith relieved would crush the Boers and stride on; that victory and peace would be celebrated about Christmas.

VI

Towards the end of November, Chamberlain received the first long private letter the High Commissioner had found time to write since the outbreak of war. Reviewing the position as it stood before the original plan of campaign was abandoned and the "army corps" broken up, Milner touched on many questions which will run through further chapters of this narrative:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

November 9, 1899.— . . . The enemy were more numerous, far better armed as regards artillery, than we had any idea of. As you know I have long been in alarm at their enormous military power and the steady development of it. But my gloomy view of their power has been surpassed by the reality. No one, for instance, anticipated for a moment that our

field artillery would be overpowered by their bringing heavy guns from Johannesburg and Pretoria. . . . But, on the other hand, they also have had some nasty knocks, have lost a good many lives (which are heavily felt in a small community) *and have not yet taken one place* which we have been able to make an effort to defend. I write this quaking, for one fears every hour for Kimberley. Still, if the transports arrive *true to time and in reasonably good order* (I fear they have had fearful weather) we may yet save all the beleaguered places. And then the end will not be far. . . .

With all the forces we may be able to put into the field it will be a slow business wearing out the enemy while the backdoor at Lourenço Marques is open. I suppose European complications might prevent our taking the bold line with Portugal. Otherwise it would be far better to say to her "Be our friend out and out, or be our enemy". In the latter case we could *blockade*, which would soon finish the business. . . .

Now, as we know, since long before Milner first went to South Africa, Delagoa Bay never had been out of the Colonial Secretary's mind. A few months before he had been vetoed rightly by the Prime Minister when he protested that by hook or by crook the Portuguese gate to the Transvaal ought to be shut against the Boers. Now he had good reason himself for shunning high-handed action against Portugal. The High Commissioner wanted to stop the supplies of food-stuffs through Lourenço Marques, as well as munitions. Chamberlain ruled not only against the wishes of the War Office but against the prevailing opinion of his own department. Some weeks before, he had been told that "it will be a strong thing to overrule Milner and Buller on this subject at this moment". His sharp minute countered:

Colonial Office, November 7, 1899.—Personally I think we are right not to seize (food-stuffs):

(1) Because I cannot believe in the possibility of *starving* the Boers or indeed of seriously hampering them by such an operation.

(2) Because we risk trouble with other Powers.

(3) Because we should be making a precedent which would certainly be quoted against us in a European war.[1]

The majority of the Cabinet agreed with this view.

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

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Our relations with Lisbon had in fact taken a strange course. As soon as war became almost certain, Chamberlain urged Lord Salisbury to see if Portuguese supplies of munitions of war to the Boers could be cut off. At first Monsieur de Soveral had highly gratified the British Government and especially the Colonial Secretary by declaring that in case of conflict Portugal could not remain neutral but must become Britain's active ally. "This engagement ... would enable England to attack the Transvaal by the Delagoa Bay Railway and to make Lourenço Marques our base of operations." [1] But amongst the Portuguese popular feeling was no more friendly than elsewhere to Britain as against the Transvaal. Nay, their national resentment against ourselves since the East African disputes of years before was as bitter as ever. Ministers in Lisbon, and above all Soveral in London, desired from Her Majesty's Government a renewed guarantee of Portugal's colonial possessions. We had to be content with a makeshift contrived when war was declared. By the very secret understanding signed on October 14, 1899, between Salisbury and Soveral the two countries agreed that "the ancient treaties of alliance amity and guarantee" remained in full force, and specifically confirmed certain articles framed in 1642 and 1661. Britain thus repeated her secular pledge to "defend and protect" all the possessions of her oldest ally. Portugal undertook not to permit the passage of arms and munitions through her territories to the Transvaal.[2] In that respect the treaty was not satisfactory in practice. A good deal of war supplies for the Boers got through.

The miscalled "Windsor Treaty" was not the Colonial Secretary's work; but any better arrangement with Portugal was made impossible by the certainty that Germany would raise inadmissible claims for compensation.[3] Yet the rage of Anglophobia abroad only deepened Chamberlain's desire to end British isolation by placing Anglo-German relations on a solid basis of mutual advantage, with the hope of friendship

[1] *British Documents on the Origins of the War* [the World War], vol. i. p. 88 (Salisbury to the British Minister at Lisbon, September 13, 1899).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 95.

[3] The German charges of bad faith against British foreign policy in this connection have been examined in a former Chapter, "The Key of South Africa", dealing with the Anglo-German Agreement upon the possible reversion of Portuguese possessions overseas.

and alliance to follow. In that sense he now made another effort. In its way it was as spectacular and ironical as any single episode in his life. At the moment he had good reason to think that the sequel between the two great peoples would be better than it proved.

CHAPTER LXIX

CHAMBERLAIN, THE KAISER AND BÜLOW: THE WINDSOR MEETING AND THE SEQUEL

(1899)

GERMAN Neutrality and the War—Chamberlain and "Isolation or Alliance?"—The Kaiser's Visit to Windsor—After Four Years—Conversations with William II. and Bülow—A Survey of World-Politics—What of Morocco?—Germany and America—Bülow's Suggestion and Promise—Chamberlain makes the Leicester Speech on "A New Triple Alliance or Understanding"—And he denounces France—Penalty of the Speech—Universal Condemnation—Bülow deserts him—The German Navy Bill—Increasing Estrangements—Chamberlain stands to his Opinion.

I

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AN august reunion long contemplated and often jeopardised took place at last. The German Emperor with his reluctant consort and two of their sons arrived in England on November 20, and stayed ten days.

More than anyone, Chamberlain desired this visit. Amidst the anti-British storms of popular excitement in Europe the Kaiser's coming would be an open proclamation of German official neutrality. Less than three weeks earlier the Kaiser had threatened to cancel his engagement unless Salisbury ceased to delay his wishes. To make sure of the visit, the stubborn Samoa dispute had to be settled, and for this purpose, as we know, the Colonial Secretary had thrown all his weight into the scales.[1]

For this decisive intervention he had received thanks and compliments from the German Government. Count Bülow hoped

[1] Even then another hitch was caused when the Prince of Wales took strong objection to a member of the Kaiser's suite, who had formerly given offence and now was forced to apologise.—*Eckardstein* vol. ii. pp. 83-87.

much to make his personal acquaintance at Windsor within the next fortnight. When the Samoan squabble was at its worst and German demands were most challenging, Chamberlain had sometimes repeated his old warning, that Britain might be driven to drastic terms of settlement with France and Russia. Holstein could not believe it. With his automatic art he reiterated that on these lines the Colonial Secretary could only worsen relations with France and Turkey, while not improving them with Russia.

When the Samoa agreement was safe and the Windsor visit assured, Chamberlain looked forward eagerly to his coming discussions with the Kaiser and Bülow.[1]

II

Unluckily on the other side of the North Sea facts and calculations were more complicated. Amongst his subjects the Emperor's journey to England was more unpopular than any act of his reign yet. It was sound policy in view not of the Samoa bargain alone but of soothing British opinion on a more hazardous question. For his new and portentous Navy Bill was impending.

"Bitter is our need of a strong German fleet", exclaimed William II., in one of the most eloquent of all his speeches, a week after the South African conflict began.[2]

Somewhat later at a performance of *Madame Sans-Gêne* in Berlin, the Kaiser between the acts discussed the Transvaal struggle with the French Ambassador, the Marquis de Noailles; and reproached France for her failure to follow him after the Kruger telegram. Germany's naval position at present compelled the strictest neutrality; but in twenty years, when he had provided himself with a fleet, he would speak with another voice.[3]

While using Eckardstein to encourage the Chamberlain-Devonshire group, Hatzfeldt protested privately that he desired no such thing as binding ties with Britain. He agrees with Holstein that German policy ought to keep free hands: "I have no fear of our falling between two stools, for no matter what may happen both sides will want us". He adds that the Duke of

[1] *Eckardstein*, vol. ii. pp. 96-107.

[2] At Hamburg, October 18. See *Kaiserreden* (Leipzig, 1902), p. 268.

[3] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 406-408 (Wilhelm II. to Bulow, October 29, 1899).

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Devonshire, though nobody in himself, holds so high a position, that the approaching Emperor ought to show him marked consideration. "But, above all, I beg that Chamberlain may be kept in view." [1] The Colonial Secretary has been growling about the abuse in the German press, and swears for a moment that nothing more can be done.

Bülow telegraphs back tartly that Chamberlain's dissatisfaction seems to show more ill-humour than reflection. That the Kaiser consents to come to England is a great event in itself, as a personal proof before the whole world's eyes of a desire for good relations. "This alone is enough for the present to make any anti-English coalition impossible. More Herr Chamberlain cannot ask." The retort goes on to recite the manifold offences of the British press in the Spanish War and since. "If Herr Chamberlain means to conduct political affairs, not merely with Boers and small folk but with Great Powers, he must accustom himself to the thought that people who are not English have also their just susceptibilities." [2] The amusing thing is that this was written only a few days after the Colonial Secretary had been elaborately complimented from the same quarter for the tact and understanding he had shown in settling a controversy between two Great Powers.

Yet a few days more and the yacht *Hohenzollern* arrived at Portsmouth. During the visit political sunshine seemed to radiate through the thick of November.

William II. had not been seen in his mother's country for more than four years—not since a discordant holiday at Cowes months before the Kruger telegram. British opinion gave him a generous reception. The Kaiser himself in his impulsive and expansive way responded to the cordial atmosphere. The Colonial Secretary also, in his very different way, was impulsive and susceptible to atmosphere. He conceived that this moment might be turned to golden account.

III

In these latter days of November 1899, the Kaiser was exalted by two triumphs destined together to be fatal. Rejoicing in the

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 410-411 (Hatzfeldt to Holstein, November 15).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 412 (Bülow to Hatzfeldt, November 15).

concession for the Bagdad railway—which would cross what Russia held to be her line of destiny—he knew also that his Reichstag would pass the great Naval Bill now ready for introduction. Within a statutory period, by a regulated method, it would double the battleship strength of the German fleet. The twentieth century would be the German century. Grasping the trident in one hand, with the historic sword in the other, a brilliant Kaiser some day would hold the balance of power in the world, create a wider Empire, and surpass the dreams of the Hohenstauffen. Meanwhile, until Germany's word could give the final law, extensive disturbances on the earth would be premature, and especially any large disintegration of the British Empire. But yet it was assumed that war between that vast dispersed system and the Dual Alliance was but a question of time. When British squadrons were separated far and wide by the necessities of that struggle, a concentrated German fleet would command what we called our home waters.

One of the fixed ideas was that until Tirpitz had created the new fleet capable of holding the balance of naval power, Britain must be kept persuaded that the goodwill of German policy was genuine though conditional.

To all this speculative ambiguity, Chamberlain's definite nature stood in contrast. It was not in him to conceive the possibility of calculations so elaborately audacious yet so perilously uncertain. His policy was to strengthen the Empire and reinforce its safety by escaping from diplomatic isolation one way or the other. More than ever, at this time, he preferred the pro-German alternative. The Parisian press, though not in essence more hostile than the German, was more virulently effective in text and caricature, not only against "Chamberlain's War" but against all who supported it, from Queen Victoria downwards. Our ambassador in Paris sent ugly accounts of French enmity. From every European capital, Her Majesty's representatives reported hatred of Britain and unmeasured calumny.[1] Nothing but the immense relative strength of the British Navy, as built up year after year under the Unionist Government, stood between the British Empire and destruction.

Against this sombre background the Kaiser's visit, as an

[1] See *British Documents*, vol. i. pp. 233 *seq.*

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open demonstration of his personal neutrality, was rightly rated by Chamberlain as of even higher value than he had formerly anticipated. The Boers were now thrown over in public by William II. as already they had been in private. But the Colonial Secretary looked further. At any cost the British Empire must replace this hand-to-mouth advantage by basic security. With all his heart and soul he desired the Anglo-German *entente* as the best for both sides. He felt in his core that the opposite solution of alliance with France and Russia—however grimly prepared he was to turn to it in the last resort—might be a dearer purchase of support. Fear of Germany never entered his head. But what would satisfy Germany?

Looking over the map, he considered amongst other things the coming problem of Morocco.[1] There an old empire was breaking up. If on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Turkey was the "sick man" of diplomacy, on the western side Shereefian Morocco was the dying man. Eckardstein states curiously that Chamberlain indirectly consulted the ghost of Disraeli by seeking out that statesman's surviving familiar Lord Rowton and hearing from his lips about the suggestions for an Anglo-German alliance made by Bismarck in 1879.[2]

IV

In advance Chamberlain was summoned to Windsor by the Queen (November 16). "With a quiet gallant heart" [3] Her Majesty talked to him for three-quarters of an hour before dinner about the war, and told him she "very much admired all he had done". Four days later, on the very day of the Kaiser's arrival, Lady Salisbury died at Hatfield, and the Prime Minister was absent from all the proceedings at Windsor.[4]

Chamberlain thought the State banquet in St. George's Hall one of the magnificent scenes of his lifetime. "The entire service of the table was gold, all the candelabra and decorations of gold,

[1] "As early as February 1899 Salisbury had declared that if Morocco collapsed England would claim its Atlantic coast; he seemed not unfavourable to Count Hatzfeldt's hint that Germany expected a share" (Erich Brandenburg, *Von Bismarck zum Weltkriege*, p. 123).

[2] *Eckardstein*, vol. ii. p. 106.

[3] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, November 17, 1899.

[4] "Poor, poor Lord Salisbury. How will he live?" *Ibid.* (from Panshanger, November 21).

and three huge screens of velvet were covered with platters and every imaginable kind of piece in gold. In fact all that the Queen possesses, which rumour says is valued at £2,000,000 sterling." [1] The Kaiser after the four years of absence was in his gayest humour: he could remember St. George's Hall since, as a small child, he had delighted in the blue cloaks of the Knights of the Garter.

Chamberlain frankly admired "the Kaiser's versatile ability in ranging over matters large and small", but left no note of the conversations which now began. We are dependent on Bülow's reports in the German archives.[2] They are full and lively accounts though he preens himself as always. As his memoirs show, he was as vain as a peacock might be supposed if it could appreciate a mirror.

After the banquet His Majesty singled out the Colonial Secretary for long colloquy. It lasted in fact over an hour. It is a pity that no artist was enabled to leave on record this animated meeting between the two most caricatured persons of their age. The Kaiser always had been universally cartooned, but at that moment the Colonial Secretary was more vilified in pictorial satire throughout most of the world than any statesman of any country ever had been in the whole world's annals. Chamberlain repeated his well known desire for an understanding between Germany, England and America. The Kaiser parried this by the familiar argument for keeping a "free hand". Formal alliances, said the clever and well-primed visitor, were not in the English tradition. Germany must safeguard her excellent relations with Russia. Yet on the Samoa model further friendly agreements with Britain could be concluded. It would assist good relations if England would remember that the Germans were a "touchy" race. All this in the tone of jovial good sense. At the end His Majesty intimated his desire to see the Colonial Secretary yet again; and received him in private audience three days later. Several new points were then touched.

The English statesman said he hoped British capitalists would support the Bagdad railway; that to this end he had already

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 413-420 (Bülow's memorandum for the records of the Wilhelmstrasse).

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opened communications with Herr Siemens; he would rather see the Germans in Asia Minor than the Russians or the French. We recall here, once more, that as far back as 1886 he drew up a large plan for railway development in the Ottoman Empire —though then it would have taken place under British auspices had he been in command—and he now encouraged the grandiose German project, as then entertained, of a line from Constantinople to Bagdad; with a bridge across the Bosphorus, giving a throughway from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. Partly Chamberlain, like his colleagues, thought no doubt that the scheme in the long run would drive a wedge between Berlin and St. Petersburg, and bring Germany closer to Britain. But, also, he honestly desired to give free scope to German enterprise in the world. In this sense he now went still further.

Coming to Morocco, he said that though England must have Tangier, Germany might have wide concessions on the Atlantic coast.[1] The suggestion was no impromptu. For weeks he had been thinking about it. The Emperor said that confidential negotiations regarding Morocco could be carried on through the German Embassy in London. Chamberlain is given as remarking that he must avoid everything which could excite Lord Salisbury's jealousy or mistrust. That point was put in a better and truer light by Count Hatzfeldt himself when at a later date he penned his own impressions:

> Mr. Chamberlain . . . who was already coming more and more to the front here, and showed the liveliest wish for a close approach to Germany, let me know that he was ready to negotiate an understanding between Germany and England on Morocco upon condition that I gave him time for it, but especially and above all that I left it entirely to him to arrange with the Prime Minister. Mr. Chamberlain indicated at the same time that Lord Salisbury was difficult to deal with. He, Mr. Chamberlain, would succeed sooner than I in influencing him [Lord Salisbury] in the sense of our wishes on the Moroccan question.[2]

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 418.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. xvii. p. 304 (Hatzfeldt to Prince Hohenlohe, May 21, 1900). This is a clearer and fairer statement of the Colonial Secretary's stipulation that there should be no 'premature approach to Lord Salisbury from the German side than Hatzfeldt gave in his letter on the actual date (November 3, 1899) of one of Chamberlain's conversations with Eckardstein. *Ibid.* p. 297.

Strange to say William II. and Bülow, both full of a sense of their superior intelligence and address, seemed almost blind to the momentous possibilities of the Moroccan question.[1] The Emperor's personal interest, usually so quick and vivacious in commenting both on the cedar of Lebanon and the hyssop on the wall, was not engaged by the "dying man" of North Africa and his heritage. The thread His Majesty then let fall never was picked up by German policy.

V

Bülow gives a more ample account of his separate interview with the Colonial Secretary. That conversation was in fact the principal episode of the Kaiser's visit. It throws wide light upon world-policy at the hour and it soon led to reverberating consequences on the platform. The two statesmen talked in the German Minister's bedroom at Windsor.

Fortunately we can throw this interview into indirect dialogue, slightly abridging Bülow's version without changing its sense in any way. We must remember again that then and after in all his records of his political encounters he magnifies his own cleverness and dexterity, consummate as he was, no doubt, in both these particular qualities.

CHAMBERLAIN AND BÜLOW

CHAMBERLAIN: "Sooner or later their two countries would have to come to a general understanding. They needed each other. England needed Germany and Germany might come to need England."

BÜLOW: "That was not the case at present. No political antagonism existed between Germany and Russia. The French were no longer thinking of a war of *revanche*—perhaps they felt Fashoda more than Sedan. So far as human calculation went Germany's peace was not threatened. England on the contrary owing to the extent of her world empire and the temerity of her statesmen might fall into grave difficulties at more than one point."

CHAMBERLAIN: "His reply showed that he foresees such difficulties in the Far East. He indulges no illusions about the growth of Russian

[1] The German Embassy in London was more vigilant but in vain. Count Hatzfeldt for years had watched Moroccan affairs,

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influence in China. He conceives that the time may come when Russian forces will be strengthened by hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Tartars, armed with Russian rifles, drilled and led by Russian officers. With no military strength to set against that, England must look to German and American support. America may have no standing army, but she has enormous resources, and in case of need, just as during the Civil War, would set great masses marching. He feels sure of American support [for the open door] in the Far East. England has enough on her hands in Asia. A second India on the Yangtse River would be too much for her to undertake. But she cannot allow herself to be driven out of China and Persia. Her interest is to maintain until further notice the integrity of China, Persia and Turkey. But for how long it may be possible to do this, who can tell? These countries are like empty sacks that by themselves cannot stand. As to German aspirations, economic or even colonial, in Asia Minor, there will be no opposition by England if Germany shows herself friendly to England at other points. To work with America is one of the cardinal points of this policy. He will do nothing that might offend American feeling. For example he would not lift a finger on account of South America despite its lands being rich with promise for the future."

BÜLOW: "If Chamberlain indeed cherishes the ideal of common action between Germany, England and America, he may well try to prevent fresh misunderstandings between America and Germany. He should use his great political and personal influence with the Americans to make clear to them the desirability of political and commercial goodwill towards Germany."

CHAMBERLAIN: "If England and Germany stood in good and intimate relations, then England would have a real interest in preventing friction between Germany and America."

Presently the talk took another turn. Complaining of the violent Anglophobia of the German press, Chamberlain declared that if this went on the British people, slow to rouse in such matters, might come to regard Germany as a settled enemy whose hostility must be faced. Bülow retorted by attacking the Berlin correspondent of *The Times*, whose knowledge and courage were at that time dreaded by the whole German Government.

Of German commercial competition Chamberlain takes a more

serious view than does Balfour, but yet he remarks that if Britain has lost markets in this way she has opened new ones instead. The closing passage of this interview is significant enough to be quoted:

> The projected strengthening of our fleet Mr. Chamberlain did not seem to relish much. Mr. Chamberlain remarked that Lord Salisbury did not wish for an alliance with us because of his general objection to binding himself. Lord Salisbury was as little for an alliance with Germany as with France or Russia. Lord Salisbury was a very cautious statesman who believed it always best to keep free hands. Mr. Balfour was more inclined to the view that a general understanding with Germany is in England's interest.[1]

Typical of the two characters is their opinion of each other. Bülow thought he summed up the Colonial Secretary as "the modern merchant, very definite, very shrewd, very unscrupulous, but withal very realistic; since he knows that without realism no business on a great scale can be done." Bringing more goodwill and frankness to it all, Chamberlain in his family circle spoke of Bülow as "an able, interesting and agreeable man".

To give this discussion at some length is essential, because it throws a flood of light upon the personality of our subject and the circumstances of the time. Chamberlain is strongly influenced by passing impressions. If he exaggerated the Russian peril, so did most of his colleagues; above all, the solid and stolid Duke of Devonshire. If his main idea of checking the huge Tsardom by the aid of Germany was to come to nothing, his other idea of arresting Russia by the aid of Japan came in the end to success beyond any dream. He surveys the whole globe with a positive mind. He foresees the power of the United States in a world crisis. He foresees no less that continued German hostility must mean the final alienation of the slower British people, who will then sink all old quarrels to guard against the most formidable of new foes.

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 413-418. Towards the end of his record, Bülow makes the very remarkable note: "In general it is beyond doubt that feeling in England is far less anti-German than the feeling in Germany is anti-English. Thus the most dangerous Englishmen are those like Chirol and Saunders, [both of *The Times*], who know from personal observation the strength and depth of Germany's antipathy to England. If the English people come to see clearly what is the feeling now predominant in Germany this would bring about a great change in its conception of Anglo-German relations."

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It will be one thing or the other. He thinks the Anglo-German alliance, working in accord with America, by far the best way out for the world as well as for both the proposed allies and their indispensable associate, to use a later word that he would have liked to know.

VI

Why then did Chamberlain pass at once from the scenes and discussions at Windsor to an unredeemed anti-climax on the platform? He was led on and then deserted. That Bülow asked him to make a public pronouncement will be shown at another point. The Kaiser, leaving behind him an almost universal feeling of reconciliation, left England on November 29. The very next day, Chamberlain made the second of two speeches at Leicester and set the world by the ears. Ready as usual for criticism, he little anticipated a blizzard of censure.

Engaged for some time to make this appearance in the provinces, when it came to eve of the duty, it was against the grain and ill circumstances conspired. He had a vile cold, but would not consent to cancel the fixture. The first speech at Leicester, good but not a distinguished effort for him, was a physical feat. He spoke for an hour and twenty minutes to 6000 people crammed together in a stifling atmosphere. In spite of his cold and a feeling of effort, he carried his last sentence as clearly as the first to the end of the building. He had well defended the justice of the British cause in the war.

But on the next day in the town, at a Unionist luncheon, he made a speech about half as long; and even of this only the smaller part was devoted to our foreign relations. Seldom if ever have remarks confined to a quarter of an hour or so on a British platform caused a harsher clatter and jangle at home and abroad.

His general theme seemed reasonable and timely. He dwelt on the connection between foreign policy and the war. In many quarters there might be a wish for unfriendly intervention; but happily our position in other ways had become stronger. Let us cultivate our friendships he urged in effect. He recalled that in the years of misunderstanding he had addressed a great meeting in Philadelphia and "I ventured to say to my audience that what

was wanted was a new Columbus to set out from America in order to discover the United Kingdom". It had seemed almost hopeless to remove many old prejudices until in the Cuban War the proof of British friendship transformed our political relations with the United States. Rousing his after-luncheon audience to a generous mood, he made his slips in the choice of words about America. "The union—the alliance, if you please—the understanding between these two great nations is indeed a guarantee for the peace of the world."

He turned to Germany. Any far-seeing statesman, he said, must desire that we should not remain permanently isolated on the continent of Europe. But there again, on the morrow of the Emperor's departure, the Colonial Secretary repeated the premature and self-defeating word "alliance".

> The natural alliance is between ourselves and the great German Empire. (*Loud cheers.*) . . . We have had our differences with Germany. . . . I cannot conceive any point which can arise in the immediate future which would bring ourselves and the Germans into antagonism of interests. On the contrary, I can foresee many things in the future which must be a cause of anxiety to the statesmen of Europe, but in which our interests are clearly the same as the interests of Germany, and in which that understanding of which I have spoken in the case of America might if extended do more perhaps than any combination of arms in order to preserve the peace of the world.

Then, by contrast, he poured invective on the French press for the virulence of its abuse, "which has not spared the to us almost sacred person of the Queen". He had in mind some recent Parisian caricatures gross and obscene. "These attacks upon Her Majesty whether as ruler of this Imperial State or still more as woman have provoked in this country a natural indignation which will have serious consequences, if our neighbours do not mend their manners."

The German press, no doubt, had been bad enough, but "It is not with German newspapers that we desire to have an understanding or alliance; it is with the German people."

So far he went that he spoke of "a new Triple Alliance"; and that phrase overpowered all his following qualifications.

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I may point out to you that at bottom, the character, the main character of the Teutonic race differs very slightly indeed from the character of the Anglo-Saxon (*cheers*) . . . and if the union between England and America is a powerful factor in the cause of peace, a new Triple Alliance between the Teutonic race and the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race, will be a still more potent influence in the future of the world.

I have used the word "alliance" sometimes in the course of what I have said, but again I desire to make it clear that to me it seems to matter little whether you have an alliance which is committed to paper or whether you have an understanding which exists in the minds of the statesmen of the respective countries. . . . An understanding, a determination to look favourably on the motives of those with whom we desire to be on terms of friendship—a feeling of that kind, cultivated, existing, and confirmed by all these three countries will I am certain be to their enormous advantage, and I believe, whether they think it themselves or not, will also be to the advantage of other nations.[1]

It was a case of love's labour lost. To his astonishment, to his chagrin and almost to his consternation, the result of an appeal so impulsive and excessive was a galling check to his public influence and a set-back to the cause he had at heart.

VII

Abroad condemnation was universal, even in Germany and the United States. At home apologists were few and constrained. Because of the manner or the matter, or of both, the second Leicester speech had a bad press everywhere, and seemed hardly to have a real friend in the world.

The Times, exceptionally informed about the realities of German feeling and policy, was icy in rebuke, especially of the word and idea of "alliance". The Opposition journals, suggesting that Chamberlain had succumbed to the blandishments of the German Emperor, proclaimed the wisdom of Lord Salisbury, and satirised the Colonial Secretary's flamboyant intrusion into foreign affairs. Needless to say, his references however qualified to "alliance"—not to speak of "a new Triple Alliance" between

[1] Leicester, November 30.

the Anglo-Saxons and the Teutons—were repudiated throughout the United States and deplored even by those who warmly recognised Chamberlain's personal services in promoting the new good feeling and were devoted to the same cause. From Germany itself, where just then he was the most abused man alive—or perhaps remembered—he received no thanks for his trouble and his hazard. He was accused of "laying on the colours too thick". He was told, in effect, that Germany desired such cool good relations with England as would not prejudice her Russian relations, and that his over-zeal and over-statement had made Count Bülow's task more difficult. One acrid German ironist remarked that his "long-spoon" speech had now been exceeded by a "long-bow" speech.

Little better fared his commination of France. Without doubt a large extent of British popular feeling was wholly with him when he denounced, with the menacing anger he felt, the brutal lampoons on Queen Victoria in the *Rire* and other Parisian prints. Yet when he summoned our neighbours as a whole to "mend their manners", the better part of his countrymen thought that he had rather lost his own. After the nightmare years of the Dreyfus affair Waldeck-Rousseau's memorable National Ministry had taken office. It included Delcassé, who more than any French Foreign Minister for many years desired to bring about more conciliatory relations with Great Britain. The villainous attacks on Queen Victoria were deplored by responsible opinion across the Channel. German caricatures less known in England had been nearly as foul as the French. One wicked Parisian jest said that Chamberlain, already waging war in South Africa for a consonant, now threatened France with war for a caricature. None the less, one good result followed. The French police were stricter in suppressing the more outrageous scurrilities of Anglophobia. After Chamberlain's challenge, however rasping at first, there was, despite the rabid passions excited by the Boer War, a wide and successful appeal in France for personal chivalry towards Queen Victoria, aged eighty, and the most venerated woman in the world. This was Chamberlain's only compensation for an odious ordeal.

Behind the scenes the censure was at least as severe as in the

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world's newspapers and speeches. The Kaiser and Bülow had departed in high complacency. Their Windsor visit seemed to have been the brilliant success of dexterous cordiality shunning embarrassing commitments. To be publicly embraced by Chamberlain at that moment in the face of German opinion was the last thing that either could desire.

The Colonial Secretary's sanguine adventure and a descent unique in his career remained inexplicable until the archives were opened in our time. It must be allowed that his method had lapsed much below his usual skill in argument and expression. Yet, as we shall now see, he was placed in a false public position largely because it was impossible for him to explain what had happened in private.

VIII

He always said that not only was he asked to make a public speech serviceable to German relations with the United States —so much is not disputed—but that Bülow promised to reciprocate in the Reichstag. The first proof that Chamberlain's own good faith was absolute is his letter, on returning from Leicester, to his friend at the German Embassy.

CHAMBERLAIN TO ECKARDSTEIN

Highbury, December 1.— . . . I had two lengthy conversations with the Emperor which confirmed my previous impressions of his extraordinary ability and grasp of European politics. I hope that in all respects his visit was a great success.

Count Bülow, whose acquaintance I was delighted to make, also greatly impressed me. He expressed a wish that I might be able at some time to say something as to the mutual interests which bound the United States to a triple understanding with Germany as well as Great Britain. Hence my speech yesterday which I hope will be not unsatisfactory to him.[1]

Eckardstein wrote back that as for the Emperor and Count Bülow "I don't doubt for a moment that your speech at Leicester has given them the greatest satisfaction". A few days later the Emperor, through our Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Frank Lascelles, sent his "compliments to Mr. Chamberlain". That states-

[1] *Eckardstein*, vol. ii. pp. 111-113, where the above letter is given in facsimile.

man the more confidently expected to be upheld by the impending speech of Count Bülow in the Reichstag. All the world waited.

Chamberlain to his wrath and contempt found himself thrown over by the Kaiser's Government.

Partly afraid of the Anglophobe agitation, but chiefly designing to exploit it skilfully for naval expansion, Bülow spoke frigidly of England by comparison with his cordiality to Russia, France and the United States. He ignored the Leicester speech. With supercilious cleverness he indirectly satirised British envy as the feeling of a sinking Power towards a rising Power. The future of the Reich depended on linking strong naval force to military force. "In the coming century the German people will be hammer or anvil." He made his hearers, and his readers next day, feel that the new fleet was mainly meant as a check, at least, on British maritime power. "As for England we are ready and willing, on a basis of full reciprocity and mutual consideration, to live with her in peace and harmony. But just because the foreign situation is at present favourable, we must utilise it to secure ourselves in the future."[1]

If the Leicester speech was an error, this kind of response was a fatality. From that moment in the conviction of a new and growing school of English thinkers—Chamberlain even yet was unwilling to belong to them—the future peril was foreshadowed; and the necessity of settling our differences with France and Russia was made only too plain. We could not allow the fate of the island and the Empire to become dependent on the casting vote of a super-armed Germany, whose projected new navy would inevitably become supreme in the North Sea—where the fate of the island and therefore of the Empire would some day be staked—if our squadrons continued, as Tirpitz reckoned, to be dispersed far and wide by our existing antagonisms.

On the personal issue the Colonial Secretary was roused. Sweeping aside Eckardstein's desperate excuses, he revealed the truth in a letter to the British Ambassador in Berlin. It was written immediately upon the publication of Bülow's speech in *The Times*.

[1] *Fürst Bülows Reden*, edited by Johannes Penzler, vol. i. pp. 88-97 (sitting of the Reichstag, December 11, 1899).

CHAMBERLAIN TO SIR FRANK LASCELLES

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December 12.— . . . It may interest you to know for your personal information, and in strict confidence, that in the long, and, so far as both manner and matter of the private conversation were concerned, satisfactory interviews with Count Bülow, his Excellency specially referred to his hope that the good understanding between the two countries might be extended so as to include the United States. In reference to this subject, he was good enough to say that he thought I might do something to bring it about, and hoped I should take some opportunity of pointing out that the interests of the three countries were identical in regard to many important questions. . . . I feel rather as if I had been made to pull the chestnut out of the fire for him.

We have seen[1] that Bülow himself, in his report written at Windsor, recorded how he had asked the British statesman to use his influence for the improvement of relations between Germany and the United States. But as the Colonial Secretary never knew that he had been betrayed by the Kaiser's letter to the Tsar in 1898, neither did he fathom the method at the end of 1899. It never entered into his mind to suspect a doubleness of which he was himself incapable. But from the German Embassy in London Count Hatzfeldt's comment on the Leicester speech came to this edifying summary:

So far as I may be allowed to judge it cannot be other than useful for us if without any kind of engagement on our side, Mr. Chamberlain sticks to the hope that we shall be induced in the end to enter into his wishes respecting an alliance or at any rate an intimate understanding. So long as he sticks to this hope he will—as in the Samoa question—show himself conciliatory in the other colonial questions that we expect to come into view, and make his influence felt in the Cabinet and especially on Lord Salisbury.[2]

As modern historians in Germany have remarked, this sort of attempt to trade on the defects of Chamberlain's frankness without due regard to his hard reserves, was bound to ruin itself.

After Bülow's oration for Anglophobes, Hatzfeldt, sinking to

[1] Pp. 503-505 above.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 426 (Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, December 2, 1899).

the grave, disliking his task yet anxious to hold his position, tried to convince Chamberlain through Eckardstein that difficulties in domestic politics had compelled the German Foreign Minister to dissemble his love. Just before Christmas he listened to the emissary's repetition of Bülow's underhand explanations; then towards the end of the year he wrote to Eckardstein in regretful but stern terms:

CHAMBERLAIN TO ECKARDSTEIN

Highbury, December 28, 1899.— . . . I will say no more here about the way in which I have been treated by Bülow. In any case I consider it advisable to drop every kind of further negotiations on the Alliance question which has been discussed between us. Whether after the end of the South African war, which seems to have thrown up so much dust, an opportunity of renewing the negotiations will return once more, is what I must leave to circumstances. I am indeed sincerely sorry that all our own earnest and wearisome efforts seem now to have been made in vain. But I am as sorry for myself. Everything was going so well, Lord Salisbury himself was in a friendly humour again, and entirely at one with us as regards the future development of Anglo-German relations. But, alas, it was just not to be [1]

Deeper was that last word than he guessed. Bülow had already written: "The vast majority of German military experts believe that the South African war will end with a complete defeat of the English. . . . At present nobody here believes that the English will reach Pretoria. But *chi lo sà?*" [2]

IX

From this situation, and events immediately ensuing, Anglo-German relations never recovered. In the eyes of passion and ignorance abroad British arms appeared not only defeated but disgraced, when for some time the largest of Empires was humiliated at all points by the smallest of peoples. German feeling swelled to a tempest of *Schadenfreude*. Prince Münster was soon reporting from Paris that "hatred of the English is

[1] Eckardstein, vol. ii. p. 125, retranslated from the German. Eckardstein does not give the English original, and there is no copy amongst the Chamberlain Papers.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 434 (note by Bülow on a letter of Hatzfeldt's dated December 26, 1899).

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almost greater than it was of us".[1] The German Government flatly vetoed our hope of getting full control of Delagoa Bay and thought of exacting some immediate price for neutrality, but Hatzfeldt wrote that the British people generally did not yet feel weak enough to cede Zanzibar.[2]

Soon, one after another, the German mail steamers *Bundesrath*, *General* and *Herzog* were held up by British warships. Then, at the beginning of 1900, the natural rage of German anger was officially stimulated by propaganda in the interests of the new fleet. In the middle of January, when Lord Salisbury seemed slow to give satisfaction, Holstein tried to frighten him by telegraphing to Eckardstein that the Kaiser debated whether in the next forty-eight hours he should send a special envoy to London in order either to exact a satisfactory answer from Her Majesty's Government or break off diplomatic relations.[3]

Amidst this turmoil Chamberlain, though holding his tongue on the subject, kept firmly to his policy of exhausting every effort to settle with Germany.

But no longer, as after the Windsor conversations, had he a trace of sentiment about it. He never appeared a stronger and cooler statesman than he is pictured in a long dispatch by Count Metternich, acting ambassador in London. He had an interview of more than two hours' duration, and his report, one of the living documents of the present book, must conclude this chapter. It is too long to quote in full. Without changing a sentence, let us attach the principal passages to the name of each interlocutor:

METTERNICH AND CHAMBERLAIN (March 18, 1900).[4]

METTERNICH: "I urged him to speak in confidence right out, his real mind, however critical, on condition that I would do the same. He began with conversations which he had with you (Bülow) at Windsor."

CHAMBERLAIN: "From those conversations he had gathered the impression that you were in agreement with him as to the broad principles of Anglo-German relations. On that assumption he had made his speech at Leicester; and in spite of everything inimical to it, and no matter what

[1] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xviii. p. 763 (January 21, 1900).

[2] *Ibid*, vol. xv. pp. 433-434 (Hatzfeldt to the Wilhelmstrasse, December 26, 1899).

[3] Eckardstein, vol. ii. pp. 144-159.

[4] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 484-491 (Metternich to Bülow, March 19, 1900).

people either here or in Germany or in America may think about it at the moment, to the end of his life he shall stick to the conviction that German-English-American understanding offers the surest basis for the future development of our peoples. . . . At the right time and opportunity he would follow the Leicester speech by other speeches in the same sense. . . . In the Reichstag, you had given him the cold shoulder.

"He then turned with vehemence to the Blue book just published after the seizure of the German steamers, and said he had learned for the first time from the Blue book itself of the sharp notes which had been exchanged. . . . He must tell me straight out that so long as such notes are exchanged there will be no chance, however much he may deplore the fact, for better relations between England and Germany. The peremptory form of the notes . . . has caused here the deepest resentment. The English and French Governments had often had to deal with each other on more difficult and serious questions but with all gravity in the substance the French in the tone of their notes had never lost their politeness. . . . Let the Governments at least keep cool at a time when peoples confronted each other with mistrust."

[The German diplomat goes on to say that Chamberlain's general tone was milder than some of his expressions. He was irritated but against his better mind; still regarding the Kaiser and Bülow as friends of England.]

METTERNICH: "I answered him with the same frankness. . . . When I had seen you in Berlin, just before I left, you (Bülow) had chanced to touch on the Leicester speech and had said, 'He is like all big men ahead of his time; and that which is not yet may come to be'. I went on to say that the two nations were fairly beginning to hate each other. What would become of his programme if, as with regret I gathered from his expressions, the two Governments misunderstood each other. He was wrong in thinking that you (Bülow) had merely shaken off his Leicester speech."

CHAMBERLAIN: "[Rather than submit to foreign intervention] England whether she won or went under would fight even a European coalition. She had faced with good fortune a European coalition before now."

The German acting ambassador was a good advocate, and his reassurances had their mollifying effect on the Colonial Secretary. Unsearchable was the heart of princes and their counsellors. Chamberlain little knew what happened a very few days

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after the conversation just quoted. The Queen of Holland entreated the German Emperor to support some collective action on behalf of the Boers. William II. explained why no such attempt was possible unless, indeed, Washington took the initiative. "Yet whoever believes in God the Lord as supreme judge of the world-order knows that He overlooks nothing in the life of peoples and that he punishes injustice with relentless severity. . . . 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord; 'I will repay.' One must look out into the future . . . armed against all emergencies lest oneself some day may be the Lord's chosen instrument.[1] Therefore it is in the interest of world-peace as well as of the Dutch-Frisian race on the Continent that a mighty [German] fleet shall be on the sea. . . . Till then Silence and Work."[2]

And Bülow? Nothing could disenchant that complete courtier —the diplomatic optimist of the German Empire—smiling the Hohenzollern system into political bankruptcy. To Metternich's long letter about Chamberlain, Bülow replied by turning the other "cold shoulder". He protested that Germany by her neutrality rendered Britain an invaluable service. He defended the aggressive notes, after the seizure of the German steamers, which had moved Lord Salisbury to a resentment such as the Foreign Office never had known him to show before.[3] Yet Bülow denounced as an embittering act the printing of the notes in the British blue-book. As for Chamberlain his complaints and susceptibilities were called petty (*kleinlich*) by comparison with Germany's policy of refusing to join in any anti-English combination. In face of British stubbornness and seeming ill-will he, Bülow, could not speak quite so confidently as he had done at the outbreak of the war about the future attitude of the German Government. And this reply the Kaiser marked "excellent".[4]

Chamberlain was not to be found the dupe of this play when it was played out. The present chapter is part of a great historic transition, and it shows him in his faults and his qualities. He was singularly unsuspicious. The Germans did not know

[1] The Lord had other views.

[2] *Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. pp. 535-539 (William II. to Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, March 27, 1900).

[3] *Ibid.* vol. xv. p. 495 (Metternich to Hohenlohe, March 24).

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 491-493 (Bülow to Metternich, March 28, 1900).

what these pages have shown, that though when confidentially approached he seemed easily entangled, he could not be netted.

His policy in this case was cooler than his Leicester speech. With the gift of simplification which distinguished him amongst the statesmen of his time, he kept his mind upon the great alternative in foreign affairs. Definite security for Britain must be found by settlement with Russia and France if Germany proved more aggressive than reliable. But with all the tenacity of his nature he preferred the pact with Berlin. We shall see him making one more effort. No man on either side, then or after, worked harder to avert an Anglo-German catastrophe.

CHAPTER LXX

BLACK WEEK—THE AWAKENING AND THE EMPIRE

(1899)

THE Colonial Secretary and the War Office—His "Line of Luck" again—Chamberlain and Milner on Boer Strength—Disaster and Revelation—Failures of Gatacre and Methuen—Colenso: Botha defeats Buller, who proposes to abandon Ladysmith—Roberts and Kitchener sent out—Chamberlain and the Rally of the Empire—Australia and New Zealand Lead the Way—Difficulties at Ottawa—Chamberlain, Minto and Laurier—How Canada came into the War—Black Week and the New Contingents—History and Destiny—"My Work has not been in vain."

I

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UP to now the Colonial Secretary had been the driving wheel of the Ministerial system, but he was not Prime Minister. By paradox, after war was declared, his administrative energies, except in one respect, became subordinate for a time, while the War Office took chief charge. Military management was the paramount task. Its departmental responsibilities, with its exceptional political risks, as in every war, pressed on other shoulders. During the interval of optimism Chamberlain's executive predominance in the Unionist Government was suspended or, we might almost say, eclipsed.

However irksome at first, this very circumstance turned out to his luck. Had he accepted Lord Salisbury's first proposition when the Government was formed, he would himself have been War Minister. Now, he could not be made a scapegoat for the army when news of reverses and humiliations came thick and fast from the fields of war while storms of public wrath shook the Cabinet. Not for long yet was his star to decline. If the Leicester speech had been his misfortunate episode and a real injury to

his influence, in a few weeks it was forgotten. Through no fault of his, in spite of his protests, his principal colleagues were injured by attacks largely ignorant and unfair. Arthur Balfour, who in some sort was acting Premier at this stage, and Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary for War, became bywords for weakness, and Lord Salisbury was regarded as a man of the past. Chamberlain was raised by the seismic disturbances which depressed his colleagues. Hailed as our only great statesman of action, he was identified with the ideals of Empire now shining brighter out of a darkness of trial.

The rally never seen before of the whole Empire, answered a world's ill-will; inspired the mother country; and fulfilled one of the highest dreams of this Colonial Minister's vivifying regime. He could speak with the accent of leadership to all our kin under the flag overseas as well as to the nation at home. There had been nothing quite like it since those years when Chatham spoke equally to Britain and North America.

With one side of the real man had they known it, many of his fiercest Liberal assailants would have sympathised. His mind was bent from the beginning upon a wise management of racial affairs in South Africa during the war with a view from the outset to a generous reconstruction.

II

The military course of the struggle with its swinging fortunes must be very briefly sketched. These vicissitudes and revulsions are inseparable from the Colonial Secretary's own life and career during the war.

At the beginning of December, the Boer forces had broken far and wide into British territories. Cape Colony like Natal was deeply invaded. Our besieged towns were the centres of excitement and anxiety. Already there had been signs of the harsh surprises this war might hold in reserve for the British army. By hard hammering, Methuen, on the march to Kimberley, had forced his way towards the Modder river, and was confidently expected to deliver that place, for it was only five and twenty miles further. But frontal tactics were met by the burghers with deadly dexterity. From trenches, aligned and concealed with

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perfect judgment, they fired upon an unsheltered enemy within easy range. We had five hundred casualties, which seemed something to the untutored Britain of those days. At the end, however, a flanking movement brought us across the Modder; Kimberley's searchlights played across the sky at night. Methuen, after the wearing exertions of his troops, halted for rest and reinforcements through the first week of December. But it was not doubted on the British side that in another week he would gain his goal. We were as expectant that about the same time Buller would force the natural barriers fortified and manned by the Boer invaders of northern Natal, and would free Ladysmith.

Chamberlain, like his colleagues and the country, still hoped on the whole—though as we shall see he did not hope heedlessly—for "decisive blows" in the fortnight before Christmas. Milner showed how his former dark estimate of Boer military power had been surpassed by its revelation. He reckoned that nothing less than 70,000 men under arms at one time would enable us to finish the business.[1] When this was received arrangements were already ahead of his estimate.

The Colonial Secretary, by rare exception, replied in one of the longest letters he ever penned, but we must confine ourselves to some sentences. Recollect that he wrote some days before the Black Week opened:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

Secret.—December 6, 1899.— . . . Even some of our strongest opponents are at last awake to the intentions of the Transvaal Government, and bad as this war is, and heavy as are the sacrifices which it entails, they see that if we had gone on in the old rut for a year or two longer—nothing could have saved South Africa to the British Crown. . . .

As regards the conduct of the war I do not allow myself to criticise . . . although we have won victories, I greatly fear that our losses have largely exceeded those of the enemy. As long as they can shoot down our men and run away to fight again another day they may continue the war indefinitely. If we had known all that we do now, I suppose that we should have taken up a position probably at Colenso and left all the northern part of Natal undefended. We ought also probably to have abandoned Mafeking.

[1] Milner to Chamberlain, November 9. 1899.

Further, I am puzzled about artillery. It is not certain to us here at any rate, that the Boers have moved heavy guns from the forts. At the same time, it is clear that their artillery, although worse served, shoots farther than ours. This will have to be thoroughly gone into later.

I am afraid that we have never had nearly enough mounted infantry, and on this ground I am glad that you are raising as many volunteers as possible. . . .

According to present expectations, we shall have in Africa, all told, over 90,000 men before long—the Army Corps being followed by a Fifth and Sixth Division successively. I hope that the strengthening of the forces in the Colony will draw off the Boers who are now gaining recruits there, but this is, for the moment, the most anxious of all the questions that have arisen.

Before this reaches you we shall know the fate of the beleaguered garrisons. Until then, I dare not speculate on the further progress of the war. The Boers seem to have fought with the greatest courage and determination, and I do not gather that they have lost their power as marksmen.

Although we could not perhaps anticipate the magnitude which the business has assumed, yet we did know enough to justify all our caution and all our patience.

I do not think that anything that can happen now will affect the determination of the nation to go through with the business to the end; but there is not much wonder that they were not eager for such a fray as long as they thought that the objects contended for were not of paramount importance and that the Outlanders generally were hardly worthy of the sacrifices which we were called upon to make for them.

In advance of disaster his eyes are well opened and his heart prepared. He likes the Boers and does not like what he used to call the "money-bags". Just because he values our stout enemy as he had always done, the issue for him is whether Boer superiority in fibre shall be for ever confessed and the Empire disappear from South Africa.

III

For the country at large in its over-confidence, the next week from Monday to Saturday—from December 11 to December 16

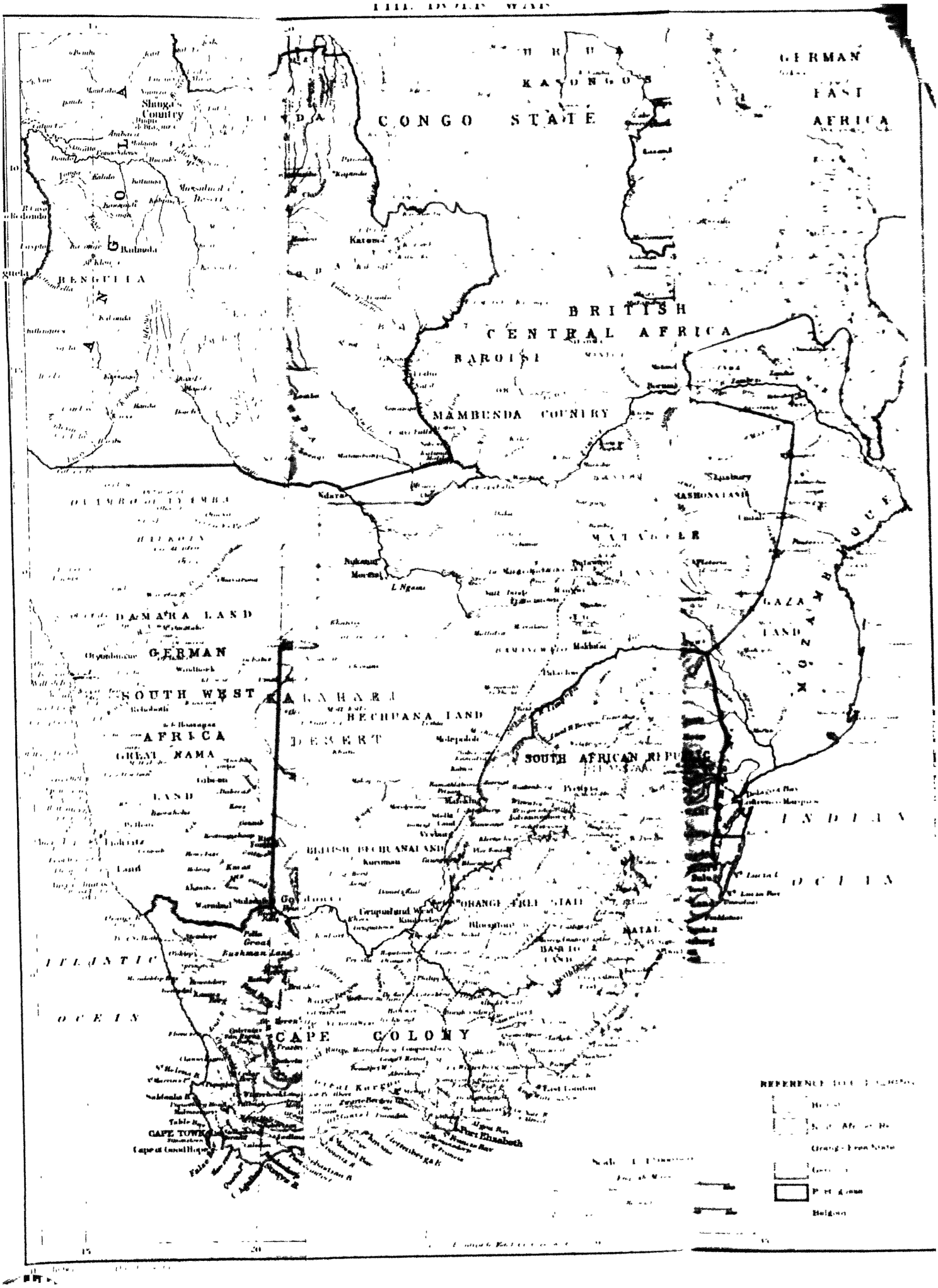
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—was a succession of shocks and humiliations. Our national life and thought never were the same again.

We had trusted somehow in our Generals, if not in our War Office. We had anticipated the speedy mastery of a sub-continent by a triple advance of our Regulars in uniform against a farmer folk "going to war in its everyday clothes". Bearded elders in frock coats it seemed murder to kill for all their bandoliers. Appearances deluded. Without uniforms, the burghers were the best mounted-infantry on record with trenches and artillery to boot. The space and configuration of the war area and their possession of its interior lines were their further advantages. They were well capable of withstanding five times their numbers trained on the correct British model and compelled to immobilise so much of nominal strength in order to hold thin, solitary lines of communication stretching through continental distances. We were now to drink a bitter cup to the dregs. In the first set campaign we were beaten by the farmers with the bandoliers. Beaten we were, right, left, and centre. For over two months more they would keep us at bay; and then for two years after, they would fight a lost cause to the last hour in a guerilla never excelled.

On Monday, December 11, our national chastening began with the news of a rough reverse in the north of Cape Colony. There, a strong blow was to be struck in a rebel region. Instead, General Gatacre's night-attack had plodded into a gloomy fiasco at Stormberg, and he had stumbled back again, losing two guns and 700 men, of whom three-fourths were unwounded prisoners—men who in the confusion of the retreat were forgotten by their superior officers before they were captured by the enemy. This sorry performance in that particular district of the struggle, was exceptionally damaging to the British name; the marvel is that the spread of rebellion in Cape Colony was not wider. One fact in our favour proved significant, though it seemed but cold comfort at the time. The Boers at Stormberg, as often before and after, were sluggish when their pursuit might have been destructive.

The middle of the same week brought the next disillusionment. Methuen's attempt to clear the road from the Modder river into Kimberley was shattered. That General, reinforced,


CONGO STATE
KAZONGO
GERMAN EAST AFRICA
Shinge's Country
BENGUELLA
BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA
BAROTSI
MAMBUNDA COUNTRY
MASHONALAND
MATABELE
GAZALAND
DAMARA LAND
GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA
GREAT NAMA LAND
KALAHARI DESERT
BECHUANA LAND
SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC
BRITISH BECHUANALAND
ORANGE FREE STATE
NATAL
BASUTO LAND
CAPE COLONY
Port Elizabeth
CAPE TOWN
INDIAN OCEAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
REFERENCE

now mustered about 15,000 men and for its size it was a splendid command. Crack regiments were its pride. But the Boers with the same ability as on the Modder had entrenched themselves invisibly for miles in front of a chain of heights stretching diagonally athwart the British line of advance. From Magersfontein ridge, the highest part of the Boer position, the battle took its name. The British artillery by preparatory fire on the Boer trenches rather aroused than damaged the enemy. After midnight, in heavy rain and a close thunderous atmosphere as well as in thick darkness, the assault was led by the Highland Brigade. Just as dawn glimmered, when the order to extend was about due but not yet given, they were caught in mass formation by murderous fusillades. Their leader fell, Wauchope, a man of romantic fearlessness. In its way, it was one of Scotland's mournful days, like Flodden. The British in good order fell back to the Modder river. We had suffered nearly a thousand casualties—which seemed considerable in a generation which had not known great war—while the Boer loss was only a quarter of that number. Direct relief of Kimberley was deferred.

But would not all be retrieved in a few days by a crushing victory of our main army in Natal? How could the Boers hope to stand between the vigorous ten thousand defending Ladysmith and the massive army advancing to its rescue? Buller's name was a popular legend. His means seemed ample, his discomfiture scarce thinkable. He was credited with a deliberate ability that would grind its way through. Few knew that from the beginning he had brought no confidence to his task; that his letters already were full of pessimism and self-distrust. Against him was no ordinary man, one still unrecognised as a great commander, but now to make his name. No less a man than Louis Botha held the masked lines along the loops of the Tugela and held the heights beyond.

Early on Friday morning, December 15, Buller began his attempt to carry the passage of the river. When did a British General show himself more devoid of alert vigilance and perception? The battle of Colenso was ill-contrived as ill-conceived. Buller could not discern, as some newspaper correspondents as well as soldiers saw from the first, that the key of the field was a

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hill called Hlangwane. Part at least of the Boers should have been taken between two fires by a concerted movement from Ladysmith. Instead, that garrison was left standing in ignorance. The British attack was totally repulsed at a cost of 1100 casualties and ten guns, a loss of artillery such "as has rarely befallen the British army".[1] The guns might have been brought off by holding on until nightfall, but they were abandoned when retreat was ordered in broad daylight, though half the army had not been engaged. The Boer casualties were negligible. Amongst those who fell in the devoted attempt to get away our guns—two were rescued—was the only son of Lord Roberts.

Buller, though personally fearless, had proved himself as irresolute as lumbering, as lacking in the steel of soldierly metal as in military vision. Owing to his outward composure, his passive stubbornness, his devotion to his men and paternal care for their physical comfort, he remained singularly popular with the army and the nation. The full extent of his deficiences as a British General face to face with a Botha could not then be disclosed. As everyone now knows after one defeat, feebly accepted—realising that his renewed attack must be delayed by loss of his artillery—he despaired of relieving Ladysmith. To its garrison he suggested surrender.[2] Happily Sir George White had more spirit and sense; and of tougher fibre were those under him, soldiers and civilians alike. The capitulation of Ladysmith then or at any time during the darker period of the war, might have been, especially in its effect upon the Cape Dutch, a menace to the British cause in South Africa.

IV

On a Friday evening in mid-December the tidings of the third and worst disaster reached London, and vibrated through the world. Black Week made doubly sure the winning of this war, no matter how long the task or how hard the sacrifice.

Chamberlain felt this instantly—that in spite of the prophecies of pessimists for a generation, our modern stuff in face of adversity would stand all tests and meet all calls. When the news of

[1] *Historical Geography of South Africa*, by Sir Charles Lucas, Part II, new ed. 1915, p. 147.

[2] *Lord Lansdowne*, by Lord Newton, p. 164; Sir M. Durand's *Life of Field Marshal Sir George White*, vol. ii. pp. 138-142; *Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. iii. pp. 173-175.

Colenso came after Magersfontein and Stormberg, he was at Highbury. His comment was: "We are bound to win in time but it will be a hard fight".

Not only Unionist leaders declared that the Empire was now at stake. For the larger Liberal section Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman himself said: "The gravity of the situation, the formidable character of the campaign as now disclosed . . . these furnish no ground for doubt or for despondency. . . . We have a united people in this country, and in every part of the Empire, and with these forces on our side moral and material success is certain."[1] But at the same time he thought it well to tell the Boers and the world that "Mr. Chamberlain is mainly responsible for this war".

As it happened the Colonial Secretary had to leave for Ireland on the very morning after Colenso, but in his absence trenchant Ministerial decisions restored and enhanced the moral position. Buller's message to the War Office, "My view is that I ought to let Ladysmith go", was instantly condemned. Lord Roberts was appointed Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. The credit of this stroke did not belong to the Colonial Secretary, as many ordinary persons thought it natural to suppose. But his colleagues well knew his mind and were certain beforehand of his approval. Had it rested with him, Lord Roberts from the first would have been at the top. A week before Colenso, that great veteran, with his genius of instinctive sagacity, had foreboded Buller's failure and offered to take supreme command. "This letter . . . is for your eye alone [the War Minister's] unless, after reading it, you think my proposal worthy of consideration; then you are welcome to show it to the Prime Minister and, if you wish, to Mr. Chamberlain."[2] It was Lord Lansdowne, then so excessively abused, who suggested to his intimate friend Arthur Balfour the new appointments, and they were authorised by the Prime Minister.

V

Unavoidable was Chamberlain's absence from London at this untoward moment. He had crossed the Irish Sea to receive the

[1] Aberdeen, December 19.

[2] *Lord Lansdowne*, by Lord Newton, p. 162 (December 8, 1899).

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honorary degree of LL.D. at Trinity College, Dublin. The arrangement was of long standing, and by that fine spirit the late Professor Henry Butcher had been proposed in kind terms that touched our statesman nearly. He accepted the invitation "with pleasure and gratitude".

Now the shadow of Colenso subdued the celebration. But Dr. Tyrrell's Latin oration had an admired touch when he spoke of the Colonial Secretary's character—"miram fortitudinem et securam constantiam"; "ingenium multiplex, animus simplex". The Examination Hall, said a witness, was "packed from door to dais". The Colonial Secretary in his red robe was greeted with fervent enthusiasm. Then outside there was a more tumultuous scene. The visitor found himself confronted by a serried mass of cheering undergraduates, whose ranks stretched across the quadrangle of Trinity. They shouted for a speech. His short response contains this reminiscent passage:

> We have had bad news, but our country has never been greatly moved by evil fortune. (Loud cheers.) In past times, we have again and again made head against adversity and we will do it now. (Prolonged cheers.) I am old enough to remember still darker days, the days of the Crimean War and the early days of the Indian Mutiny—and I hope that now as then the darkest hour will be found to precede the dawn. Meanwhile, to-day, our hearts must all go out to that noble Irishman who, suffering himself from the greatest loss which can befall a father, has undertaken a heavy burden of responsibility in the cause of duty and in the cause of his country.[1]

Nationalist disturbances in Dublin had been darkly prophesied, but in the streets there were only a few lively scuffles between the students and the crowd. Next day the Colonial Secretary and Mrs. Chamberlain, leaving Ireland by the night mail, crossed on the same boat with Lord and Lady Roberts and their daughters. Silent about his sorrow—as outside his family he was for ever after—the quiet veteran had made ready in forty-eight hours, and was about to sail for the Cape. In every emergency the little man had the highest degree of serene spiritual power that a soldier can possess. "He says his prayers every night and leaves the rest to God", remarked once his great-

[1] Dublin, December 18, 1899.

hearted wife to the present writer. But how much would have been saved had he been sent out two months before.

VI

Chamberlain had not been out of touch for a moment with his own department. By telegraph the whole Empire was knitted. From the day after Colenso offers of assistance, promptly accepted, were pouring into the Colonial Office from all parts of the Queen's dominions. His long work was rewarded; his position solidly buttressed at home; his most ardent aspirations surpassed in this crisis; and every hope for the future of Imperial unity seemed attainable.

His dearest desire had been that in an hour of trial like this the self-governing men overseas would take up arms and stand shoulder to shoulder with the mother country for a common cause. If once they shed their blood together what could part them ever after?

Certain troops from overseas were already in the field as a symbol and here we must sketch the earlier history of the Colonial contingents.

In the alarms after the break-down of the Bloemfontein Conference, when the Cabinet inclined for a moment to send an ultimatum to Pretoria, the Colonial Secretary drafted a suggestion that if it came to war the self-governing Colonies should join with the mother country to assert the cause of racial equality and Imperial security in South Africa.[1] The prospect improving, he held back the draft. Some weeks later he sent a message overseas that a general assertion by the Colonies of their determination to make common cause in the event of hostilities "would have a great moral effect and might go far to secure a peaceful settlement".[2]

Australia led the way. Her States were not yet federated, though on the eve. The Cape might become a position vital to their own lines of connection with the mother country. From the time of Majuba their men had volunteered, and they had served later in the Sudan campaign. Some of their own miners

[1] June 9, 1899. Prepared for Lord Minto but not sent.

[2] July 3, 1899. *Lord Minto*, by John Buchan, p. 133.

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were amongst the Uitlanders in the Transvaal. Australia grasped the question. As early as July 11, 1899, three months before the outbreak of war, Queensland made the first sign of colonial help at need—250 mounted men with machine guns. Victoria followed; and then in New South Wales nearly 2000 officers and men offered to volunteer. It was soon certain that in emergency all the Australian States would do their share. And New Zealand still more in proportion. Presently the Jamaica militia volunteered to a man. Various offers came from Trinidad, Malaya, Hong Kong, Lagos. But the struggle, if it came, would be a white man's war. Another lull in the Transvaal controversy suspended for several months this early movement.

When war impended in October, communications passed rapidly between the Colonial Secretary and the overseas Governments.[1]

Incredible to say, but for Chamberlain the ardour of the Colonial rally, wonderful as it was in spirit and promise, would have been extinguished. Conventional officialism at the War Office was sublimely supercilious. The professional soldiers did not want the colonials at all. If some must come, let them be as few as possible. Above all, instead of retaining their special identity, they must become indistinguishable drops in the military bucket. As the War Minister put it later in a Memorandum for the Cabinet,[2] Aldershot regarded Colonial men as "necessary evils". Poor Buller's mental lethargy was typified in the infatuated word: "In view of numbers already available, infantry most, cavalry least, serviceable". This was the sapient dictum afterwards paraphrased with cruel justice: "Unmounted men preferred".[3]

We saw in a former chapter how the handful of New South Wales Lancers training at Aldershot went out first on the very eve of war and rode through the cheering City of London. Soon there was the same enthusiasm "down under" when contingents began to embark direct for the field of action. Amidst stirring scenes Australia's first twelve hundred and New Zealand's two hundred were hailed at Cape Town towards the end of

[1] Correspondence relating to the dispatch of Colonial Military Contingents to South Africa, November 1899. Cd. 18 of 1900.

[2] March 14, 1900.

[3] Chamberlain's telegram transmitting the views of the War Office, October 3, 1899.

November, and went straight to the front. As yet these movements were regarded on all sides as a spirited demonstration, most valuable in a moral sense and enlivening as a symbol, but not seriously required as a military reinforcement of the mother country.

VII

We must now see what had been happening in Canada, where very different conditions raised more complex controversy and the event for some time was more doubtful. In the preceding year, 1898, a new Governor-General had to be appointed after Lord Aberdeen. Chamberlain much desired the succession of the Duke of Connaught—who accepted that great position a dozen years later—but the Queen's consent could not then be gained. For various reasons several distinguished persons declined nomination. In the end, Chamberlain agreed to the suggestion, at first surprising, of Lord Minto. A great horseman, he was as yet chiefly celebrated for having broken his neck in the Grand National and survived. After many hardy adventures he had been Lord Lansdowne's military secretary in Canada, and served in the Riel rebellion. Though he had never held political office of any kind, he was influentially supported. The appointment proved admirable, and was to lead from the Governor-Generalship of Canada to the Viceroyalty of India.

Tension between the two races in Canada was certain should the South African question become acute. Quebec would be negative: Ontario insistent. The Premier was gracious, subtle and more sincere than his eloquent flexibility sometimes implied. His compromises with Imperialism were intellectual efforts made against his heart. Feeling himself a link between the races whom he wished to draw closer together, he was well qualified and disposed, when the predominant interest of the Dominion prompted, to grasp and apply British views contrary to his own inclination. But his inmost thought was that Canada, having no effective voice in Imperial counsels beforehand, must not necessarily go to war whenever Great Britain went to war. For himself, could he have had his way, he would have stood out of the first phase of hostilities. No interest of Canada,

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strategical or commercial, seemed to be at stake. In the end Laurier's hand was forced by an English-speaking majority—by its pressing sympathies with the mother country in arms and with the general ideals of closer Imperial Union preached by the Colonial Secretary. Needless to say, true and deep conviction in that cause was whetted by Opposition appetite, according to the usage everywhere of all parties in turn under democratic systems.

On July 18 the Governor-General had received the Colonial Minister's "secret and confidential" enquiry whether there was any probability of a Canadian offer of troops. "I do not desire that it shall be the result of external pressure or suggestion ... we hope that the expedition will be only a demonstration and that peace will be preserved.... On the other hand it may result in a most important military operation. I am communicating with New South Wales and Victoria in the same sense although this is more difficult as I shall only be able to use the cable." [1]

Minto took a day to sound the situation and then telegraphed, "Feel sure the proposal would be received with enthusiasm".[2] A following letter enlarged upon Laurier's reluctance, his dread of hostility in Quebec, his mood of goodwill without a spark of enthusiasm; but added, "I am quite positive that in any real emergency the British determination to assist the mother country will be irresistible by any Government".[3]

At the end of that month strong resolutions advocating equal rights and liberties for the Uitlanders and expressing confidence in the Imperial Government were passed unanimously by both Houses of the Canadian Parliament. Sir Wilfrid eloquently upheld these themes, but then wrote at once to his Excellency that "the present case does not seem to be one in which England, if there is war, ought to ask us, or even to expect us, to take a part; nor do I believe that it would add to the strength of the Imperial sentiment, to assert at this juncture that the Colonies should assume the burden of military expenditure, except—which God forbid—in the case of pressing danger".[4] Once more the Governor-General replied that there was no question of urging or even asking Canada to give material assistance, warmly

[1] Chamberlain to Minto, July 3, 1899.
[2] Minto to Chamberlain, July 20.
[3] Minto to Chamberlain, July 25.
[4] Laurier to Minto, July 30, 1899.

as a spontaneous offer would be welcomed. He repeated to the Colonial Secretary his confident opinion that at any serious moment that offer would be made. Weeks later, however, the Canadian Premier seemed still more reluctant. About a fortnight before the Boer ultimatum the Governor-General says: "I think there is no chance of a contingent being offered".[1] Quebec's repugnance was unchanged.

A legend has arisen in Canada that on the eve of war an astute Colonial Secretary by indirect pressure with Lord Minto's aid forced the hand of the Canadian Premier.[2] That there is no good ground for this judgment appears from events in their order. The feeling of the English-speaking majority ran high for the mother country and could not have been withstood. On October 3 Chamberlain cabled to Ottawa a message identical with that sent to the Australian Colonies in answer not only to their enthusiastic offers but to their enquiries.

How could he wisely leave out the great Dominion? A weak Minister might have hesitated; not he. Profoundly he believed that Canadian participation was vital; that the marked abstention of its Government would weaken the whole Imperial movement and frustrate the moral impression he meant to make on the world. He did not apply pressure; but like a strong man at a pinch he gave a lead.

The cable of October 3 was in its nature and intention not secret but resounding. The gist of it was published in the British press and repeated in Canada. There the demand of the majority —irritated by what seemed to them an inglorious contrast with the Australian colonies—rose to vehemence, and, after the Boer ultimatum, became irresistible. The Canadian Government seemed inclined to a queer compromise whereby it would equip and transport volunteers up to one thousand men. But they were not to be officially recognised as a Canadian contingent.[3] At this Chamberlain answered:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MINTO

October 6, 1899.— . . . I am sorry and a good deal disappointed at Laurier's decision with regard to the contingent. We do not intend to

[1] Minto to Chamberlain, September 23, 1899.

[2] O. D. Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, vol. ii. pp. 93-100.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 97.

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accept any offer from volunteers. We do not want the men and the whole point of the offer would be lost unless it were endorsed by the Government of the Colony and applied to an organised body of the Colonial forces. . . .

Laurier was on a visit to Chicago when the Boers launched their summons. Already he was warned by some of his nearest adherents that troops would have to go, or, in another sense, he would have to go. "It is fair to explain that Sir Wilfrid contended the war in South Africa, if war there should be, would be a petty tribal conflict in which the aid of the Dominions would not be required, and that over and over again he declared he would put all the resources of Canada at the service of the mother country in any great war for the security and integrity of the Empire."[1]

When war actually began on October 11 Laurier still longed to keep out of it. But he returned at once from Chicago, and, when he reached Ottawa, realised that a sweeping tide threatened the edifice of his Ministry.[2] He made up his mind. The contingent must be offered, whatever difficulty he might have to face on the Quebec side. On Thursday the 12th the Cabinet sat all day. "I cabled to you in the evening", wrote the Governor-General, "when I thought the offer of troops hopeless." But the Cabinet sat again next day and the thing was done.[3] It was not the least happy moment of Chamberlain's life when on Saturday morning, October 14, after ten days of disappointment, he received Minto's cable that the Laurier Government would send a battalion of over a thousand infantry and send them in the name of Canada.

To him it meant that in action the Empire was one.

This, too, was to be more fateful for the Colonial Secretary himself than he could then suspect. Had not the great Dominion rallied with the rest in the Boer War he would not have been brought to stake his life upon his last crusade for Imperial unity.

In thanks, through the Governor-General, he now looked far:

[1] Sir John Willison, *Reminiscences Political and Personal*, p. 303.

[2] The *Montreal Star*, for instance, had published telegrams from the Mayors of three hundred leading cities and townships urging the immediate dispatch of troops.

[3] Minto to Chamberlain, October 14, 1899. See Buchan's *Lord Minto*, pp. 141-142.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MINTO

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October 26.— . . . All's well that ends well and very few people have any idea of the hitch which took place in the course of the arrangement. Will you please take some opportunity of telling Sir Wilfrid Laurier from me that I fully appreciate his difficulties and was delighted that he was at last able to overcome them. I am sure that the action of Canada and of the other Colonies will leave a lasting impression in the country and will tend more than anything else to draw the Empire closer together.

VIII

That was the beginning. Now, less than two months later, the Imperial movement overseas after Black Week became a far greater thing. Apart from the large levies of British South Africans themselves, the Colonials as yet in the field were only 2500 all told. To that number 10,000 more were added in a few months. Before the end of the war Canada and Australasia had sent altogether over 30,000 men.[1] The British in South Africa raised from first to last, in all ways, another 30,000 men. Overseas horsemen doubled our mounted forces. Through all the tests of danger and endurance they proved their quality and won their honours. The mother country responded with unbounded affection and felt in itself younger and kindled. The colonial contingents gave uneasy thought to foreign hostility. All this was magnificent and it was war. There could be no final failure now unless the Empire were to be broken by involving its young peoples in unforgivable defeat.

When British arms were baffled everywhere in South Africa the Laurier Ministry at Ottawa was prompt by contrast with its reluctance at the outset. Already after Nicholson's Nek, Sir Wilfrid in his desire to allay racial antagonism and to check a jeering opposition, but also with a warmer willingness of his

[1] Colonial Conference, 1902, Cd. 1299, Appendix II. p. 43, where the following totals are given:

Canada (including garrison of Halifax) . . .	8,400	Queensland 2903, South Australia 1494, Western Australia 1165, Tasmania 796) . . .	16,463
Australia (New South Wales 6208, Victoria 3897,		New Zealand (approx.) .	6,000
			30,863

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own, had offered a second contingent. It was provisionally declined; but on the day after Colenso, Chamberlain telegraphed a grateful acceptance. And this time he was able to add, reversing the former foolishness of the military, that mounted men would be preferred. Canada was alive with excitement.

At home the obstructive pedantry of the War Office was broken. A few weeks before, the Colonial Secretary had to exert himself to prevent that institution from cutting down the first Canadian contingent to 500 men—"a fatal policy", he exclaimed—and trying to break it up as a national unit. Then, also, the gifted professionals were kicking even harder against colonial guns than against colonial horsemen. Now, the second contingent numbered 1300 riders and marksmen, with three field batteries. Before they sailed the Canadian High Commissioner in England was raising at his private cost—ultimately over £200,000—Strathcona's Horse, enrolling nearly 600 roughriders from the North-West. When communicating his intention to the Colonial Secretary, to whom he always stood very close in sympathy, this quiet Monte Cristo trusted that his effort might be of "some use to her Majesty's Government in the war which has been forced upon us and upon the issue of which such matters of vital importance to the Empire depend".[1] This was early in the New Year, 1900. Next, the Laurier Cabinet raised a special battalion to garrison Halifax, and thus released the Leinster Regiment for active service with Lord Roberts.

Needless to say our furthest kin, unhindered by racial dualism as known in South Africa and Canada, were doubly stirred, and rejoiced the Colonial Secretary by their telegrams. Led by New South Wales, in the extent of its contribution, each of the six Australian Colonies, so soon to be federated into one Commonwealth, sent a second contingent, formed on the new principle, cabled by Chamberlain, of "mounted men preferred". Further, and chiefly by private subscription, the Australian Bushmen were raised in the "back blocks" and sailed in the early spring of 1900. Soon these were followed by the larger force of Imperial Bushmen recruited when Chamberlain cabled the proposal. In

[1] Strathcona to Chamberlain, January 10 and 15, 1900.

this case the Home Government defrayed all expenses.[1] Since Black Week large numbers of volunteers had been in camp all over Australia to be ready at need.[2] When the first of the new contingents sailed just after the middle of January, cheered by hundreds of thousands, enthusiasm filled Sydney with the largest multitude that up to then had ever been brought together in the southern hemisphere.

New Zealand did best of all. The population, excluding Maoris, was then little more than three-quarters of a million. Its Prime Minister was Richard Seddon, than whom Chamberlain had no stauncher supporter. In his way Seddon was a rugged monument of a man, like Kruger. On the morrow of Buller's repulse, the two Houses were not in session, but the Premier by telegram recommended to all their members another contingent. Typical of the spirit of the responses was one: "if seventy not too old am willing to go myself in defence of my Queen".[3] Three days later Seddon's glad message was in Chamberlain's hands. This new force was on the sea early in 1900 before Parliament met at home. Other contingents followed; and others still. New Zealand at the end had sent ten altogether, totalling over 6000 troops from the most advanced of all democracies at that time. That Dominion, as we now call it, sent in proportion to its population far more men than Australia or Canada; and was not exceeded in service and sacrifice by the mother country itself.

The eagerness of the Crown Colonies under his direct administration it was for the most part Chamberlain's duty to repress. Nor are the affairs of India for these pages. Princes and notables gave generous gifts, but at all costs this struggle had to be kept a white man's war. The British in India and Ceylon sent their gallant little delegation to what was now in truth an army of the Empire, like no army seen in the Queen's reign. Stray men of our blood came to join up from the Far East and South America —from every outpost of British enterprise and adventure in the world. Where fighting wishes could not be gratified, loyalty in other forms was active in all the coloured communities in three continents—from the West Indies and West Africa to Malaya

[1] Chamberlain to Mr. (afterwards Sir William) Lyne, Premier of New South Wales, March 1, 1900.

[2] *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, vol. iii. p. 34.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 37.

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and Hong Kong—for which this great Minister was then responsible.

Well might he say often at this time, "My efforts have not been in vain"; and dream higher in his methodical way of dreaming.

CHAPTER LXXI

CHAMBERLAIN AT BAY—THE WAR RETRIEVED

(1900)

A NEW Year of Gloom—Defeat and Deadlock—National Indignation—The Government in Danger—Parliament Meets—The Last Session of the Nineteenth Century—Chamberlain increases his Ascendancy—Famous Speeches—The Empire in Arms and Its Future—"The Federation of Our Race"—Lord Roberts transforms the War—The Sweep of Strategy—Kimberley, Paardeberg, Ladysmith—Baden Powell "217 Not Out"—London Goes Mad and "Mafficking"—How it happened and Why—Raking up the Raid—"Let them do their Worst."—Chamberlain's Range in Debate.

I

WE have overshot the situation as it stood at home when Roberts and Kitchener went out.

For weeks yet, and they seemed like months, Chamberlain's confidential information from South Africa was to be as gloomy and anxious as the public news. The press as a whole, and by no means only the new cheap press, raged for someone to hang. The mass of the Unionist party seethed with revolt. Our guns, they cried, were outranged, our maps inferior, our underestimate of the Boers had been imbecile; nothing had been foreseen.

From Highbury Chamberlain, apologising for the untutored working of his civilian mind, plied the War Minister with characteristic questions. Could we not imitate Sherman in Georgia and send into the Republics from one side or the other flying forces able to live on the country? At Christmas he is invigorated by reading in Sir Herbert Maxwell's *Life of Wellington*, the severity of our vicissitudes in the Peninsular War. "The rising in the Cape Colony is the only thing that seriously alarms me." This for Arthur Balfour. At New Year he urges on the same

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colleagues that reserves of munitions are dangerously low, and that the War Office is dull on the business side. "The contract department goes to sleep and the public service suffers."

The most living part of his papers at this time is again the correspondence with the High Commissioner from the Black Week up to a stormy meeting of the Imperial Parliament.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MILNER[1]

December 14, 1899.—*M. to J.C.*— . . . My general conclusion is: a rapid conquest of the Republics in the manner originally contemplated is now improbable. It is still possible . . . to wear them out at great cost by a protracted campaign. And this is worth doing . . . no room for both of us in South Africa.

January 1, 1900.—*J.C. to M.*— . . . The temper of the people is admirable. I always had absolute confidence in them, but they have exceeded my expectations. It must be clear to everyone that they will see the matter through at whatever cost. . . . Their (the Boer) mobility . . . . makes one Boer worth three or four English. No one suggested at the outset of the war that this would require such immense preponderance of force on our side if we were to hold our own. No one, either military or civilian, ever suggested to me that more than an Army Corps would be required. It now appears that two or even three will be necessary. . . .

Milner's next dispatch, received in the middle of January, written under high tension, alarmed and displeased the Cabinet. The High Commissioner desperately driven, slashed at Buller's muddling and at all the military blunders. Delagoa Bay, the open door to the Transvaal, must be barred somehow; the Bond Ministry is wellnigh insupportable; temporary suspension or alteration of the Cape Constitution will have to be faced. This latter proposition, repugnant to the Colonial Secretary's feeling about the present and the future, foreshadows a long tough controversy between these two natures, so closely associated, so unlike.

II

Parliament was summoned for the end of January. Steadfastness of public opinion in the island was the political basis

[1] Chamberlain Papers.

of the Imperial cause. European diplomacy was rife with speculations upon the possible fall of the Salisbury-Chamberlain Cabinet. It was loaded with blame and scourged with epithets by most Unionists, not to speak of the Opposition. Even the Colonial Secretary was not quite sure that the Government would long survive the meeting of the House of Commons.

At Highbury he had passed through one of his recurrent periods of depression, and had more reason for it than for many years past. His colleagues had not been lucky on the platform. Balfour's spirit after Colenso had been virile. Woefully unsuccessful were his speeches to his constituents in Manchester early in the New Year. Instead of standing in a white sheet and promising amendment, he declared that he did "not feel the need, so far as his colleagues were concerned, of any apology whatever". Amongst those colleagues Balfour was chivalrously concerned for his friend since Eton days, Lord Lansdowne, the War Minister, who at the moment was the whipping-boy of the Cabinet. This too unqualified defence of that reprobated institution the War Office nigh ruined the public influence of the Unionist leader of the House of Commons. Almost universally damned were his Manchester speeches.

Chamberlain thought them excellent. In private he inveighed bitterly against newspaper attacks, and accused the press, as a whole, of showing less fortitude and sense than the ordinary man.

The Colonial Office seems no longer the same to him when his first lieutenant, Selborne, and Cochrane, his devoted secretary, go to the front. Ladysmith had repulsed on Waggon Hill an assault of the kind which all War Office theories had assumed the Boers would never dare. Brave as they were, their attacking power in the open was not equal to their aptitude in defence. But could Ladysmith hold out? Buller at intervals went backwards and forwards with laborious futility on the Tugela. Sailors on the Modder had chalked their naval gun "Joe Chamberlain". In mid-January he writes home from the Colonial Office:

January 16, 1900.— . . . I do not look forward to the Session with much pleasure but perhaps it may relieve me of all pressure by turning the Government out of office. . . .

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Buller's second attempt to relieve Ladysmith failed again. Spion Kop was captured, then abandoned; heavy casualties useless. This sorry muddle made Chamberlain miserable. He is "low in his mind" notes his wife. A week before the ominous meeting of Parliament the Colonial Secretary is summoned to Osborne for a night. "Jack Cade" after many years has become Her Majesty's favourite Minister, and while the gloom of the struggle is yet undispersed he finds the Queen at over eighty an example to all her people for "judgment and courage".[1] After three hours at the Defence Committee, chiefly concerned with what he called "the sickening fiasco" of Spion Kop, he wrote to his wife that Buller's explanations leave the affair inexplicable—"it is clear that whatever else our generals can do they cannot write dispatches".[2] This was towards the end of January 1900, one of the most exasperating months in British history. A few days later Buller carried Vaal Krantz, supposed to be another key to Ladysmith, but this operation, too, retreat turned into a fiasco. At that the British Commander in Natal was no longer likened to the Duke of York, who marched up and down a hill. For one who crossed and recrossed a river a wittier word was found. They called him the "ferryman" of the Tugela.

III

On Monday, January 30, the two Houses met for the last full session of Parliament in the nineteenth century, and the last in the long reign of Queen Victoria. All signs being dangerous for the Government, were they not especially so for the Colonial Minister? Most Liberals believed this; many Unionists feared it. However riven otherwise, the Opposition again united almost to a man in their antipathy or sub-hostility towards him. Even Rosebery and his group, though supporting the war, were edged against Chamberlain. We can understand why that statesman disliked nearly all the Liberal Imperialists except Grey and Haldane more than the fervent pro-Boers.

Nothing he thought could change his regard for Harcourt; and

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, January 25, 1900.
[2] Saturday, January 27, 1900.

from time to time in a pale but not ungenial way his meetings with Morley took a reflex light from the former sunshine of friendship. But now came barbed provocation from Harcourt himself, who encouraged the intentions of the Opposition to rake up all the old charges about the Colonial Minister's supposed dark part in the baleful raid. That "old friend" seemed to become "a new enemy"—as Castruccio put it—when he sent his challenge in form. "In speaking on Monday I shall think it necessary to call attention to your speech in exoneration of Rhodes and to the suspicions caused by it in regard to the matter of the telegrams which Hawksley refused to produce before the Committee."[1] To this sharp cartel the sterner duellist answered the same Saturday evening: "Your note is a surprise to me, and I am sorry that after thirty years' friendship you should be prepared to countenance any suspicion of my word". But Harcourt was both obstinate and evasive in reply: "Nothing that I shall say will imply upon my part suspicion of your word". Yet he went on to infer that a cloud rested upon the Colonial Secretary's name.

From this, alas, their private relations, which had withstood all the violence and corrosiveness of the Home Rule schism, were severed for more than two years. Chamberlain's steel was out of the scabbard. He considered that no procedure could be more damaging to the British cause.

For some days the debate went ill for the Government in both Houses. Lord Salisbury blamed the past niggardliness of the Treasury to the indignation of its permanent guardian, Sir Francis Mowatt, then the very Cerberus of civil servants. The Prime Minister had to explain himself away. The Opposition in the House of Commons moved a Vote of Censure, designed to veil their own feuds and to bring the largest muster into the lobby. Ineffective in the debate was one Minister after another. The Unionist ranks were sore and sullen. Some change of feeling in favour of the Government began when Wyndham by one picturesque oration marked himself out for the Cabinet. He conjured up a true sense of oceanic distance, the stretch of sea-power and maritime transport, the big work of Admiralty and War Office since Colenso.

[1] Harcourt to Chamberlain, February 3, 1900.

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Not yet were Unionist confidence and solidarity re-established. It was truly noted, "They are all looking for Joe to make a speech such as he alone can make".[1] The Opposition sections trained concentric fire upon the Colonial Secretary. It was a crescendo of bombardment. The official Opposition amendment deplored "the want of knowledge, foresight and judgment displayed by her Majesty's Ministers". Though the plural was used one Minister was the quarry. Harcourt's was the main arraignment. His speech, to its disadvantage, was supported by a mass of manuscript, turned over leaf by leaf. Monumental in form but funereal in delivery, he never warmed the House. He repeated the story of the Raid. The words were guarded, even mild, but unmistakeable, the inference that Chamberlain was on his trial.

That statesman had listened impassively with head leaned back; his face paler, as usual under stress, and a little drawn; his eyes closed. He looked, someone said, like a hard soldier sleeping under fire. The strain of the last weeks had been severe, but the appearance of slumber was a mask. Once or twice a sudden interjection showed how vigilantly he was alive.

IV

When his turn came he rose, perhaps more softly than his wont. Upon him all eyes in the House of Commons were fixed. Long Unionist cheers rolled and swelled, in hope that the fighting powers of the one man who for years had never failed them in a crisis when their ranks were momently borne back would make head against adversity and turn the battle. Not a seat was empty round him; so full the galleries that many peers crowded out of their own, "stood at the top of their staircase".[2]

No one guessed what trouble it had cost him the night before to reduce his apparatus to three sheets of notepaper—and he hardly referred to them—as against his opponent's thick sheaves methodically perused. His first low words soon followed by a louder pitch laid on the House a grip unrelaxed for an hour. His

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, February 2.

[2] Note by an eye-witness. Alexander Mackintosh, *Joseph Chamberlain: An Honest Biography*, p. 267.

parliamentary and platform styles were very distinct. This once, his voice was higher and more ringing than was his habit in Parliament. He spoke with the undisguised force of personal authority, and dealt with the House of Commons as though it were but a somewhat select kind of public meeting. The majority of the House had craved for trenchant leadership. They had it. He had never appeared so unmatchable in his continuous command of sentences like bullets. Every bullet had its billet. But the rapidity of his fire as we may say never disturbed the coolness of his aim. He outdid Harcourt in moderation of manner as in argumentative energy.

Yet the plainness covered his shrewdest courage. While laborious mediocrity under accusation seeks to answer everything, a born debater may be known by his bold omissions. Nothing could reduce Chamberlain to the defensive. He declined for that time to revert to the Raid when life and death were now in the scales. There would be no second retrocession as after Majuba. Yet the settlement would be healing:

> You may blame us, and perhaps rightly, that throughout this business we have been too anxious for peace. But no impartial man, no man who knows the facts, can truly and properly blame us for having been too eager for war. Our efforts were fruitless. Our objects were reasonable. . . .

Finally, he inspired the large majority of the House of Commons by his vision of the Empire in action and by his faith in the future of its unity:

> Sir, we shall have in this war before it is over an army of colonials called to the aid of Her Majesty who will outnumber the British army at Waterloo, and who will be nearly equal to the total British force in the Crimea. . . .
>
> What other nation in the world could have put 180,000 men into the field 7000 miles from these shores—a volunteer army—in so short a time? Where else could the transport have been found for such a large force, working with such precision, such speed and such safety?
>
> Our colonies, repelled in the past by indifference and apathy, have responded to the sympathy which has recently been shown to them. A sense of common interest, of common duty, an assurance of mutual support and pride in the great edifice in which they are all members, have

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combined to consolidate and establish the unity of the Empire; and these peoples shortly—very shortly as time is measured in history—about to become great and populous nations, now for the first time claim their share in the duties and responsibilities as well as the privileges of Empire.

Accordingly you have the opportunity, now that you are the trustees, not merely of a Kingdom, but of a federation, which may not, indeed, be distinctly outlined, but which exists already in spirit at any rate. You are the trustees: they look to you as holding the headship of your race; and we owe them an infinite debt of gratitude for the moral as well as material support that they have given us. . . .

In Africa these two races, so interesting, so admirable each of them in their own way, so different in some things, will now, at any rate, have learned to respect one another. . . .

Meanwhile, we are finding out the weak spots in our armour and trying to remedy them; we are finding out the infinite potential resources of the Empire; and we are advancing steadily, if slowly, to the realisation of that great federation of our race which will inevitably make for peace and liberty and justice.[1]

How distinctly, as we see now, does this strain of convinced imagination prefigure, three years in advance, the height of his endeavour.

So the fortunes of a session expected to be critical and perhaps fatal for Ministers, were settled in their favour by one battle at the outset. Chamberlain's achievement was amongst his greatest in the House of Commons, perhaps the greatest of all. He had often in his combative mood made more brilliant speeches to excite his supporters and overbear his foes. But this feat confirmed the steady weight of discipline. It restored Ministerial strength; compacted and animated the Unionist ranks; dispelled the mirage of an early Rosebery Cabinet; sobered European and Boer speculation upon British domestic dissension; and nourished the spirit of the Colonies. At the same time by its "immense restraint"—the chief impression on all who heard it—it fairly wrung respect from the Opposition, and gave them pause in his regard just when they most hoped to bring him low. Rising the same night

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxviii. cols. 609-624 (February 5, 1900). Also *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, edited by Charles W. Boyd, vol. ii. pp. 52-67.

to condemn the war-policy, one of the sternest confessors on the unpopular side, Leonard Courtney, said:

> No one who heard the speech of the Colonialy Secretar can have helped admiring its force, its ability, and its effectiveness. Never has the right honourable gentleman addressed the House of Commons with such energy, never had he displayed such debating power.

Long afterwards Liberal opponents were wont to remark that "his extraordinary powers in debate never were shown to better advantage". Next day it was the topic of all the newspapers. *The Times*, his unsparing censor after the Leicester speech, now pronounced:

> He lifted the whole question of the war high above the mists and the miasma of party strife and into the serener air of Imperial statesmanship. His speech is conspicuous for dignity, candour, breadth of view, clearness of purpose, and silent disdain of the trivial sophistries wherewith little men prove their incapacity to treat great affairs.

Above all, the Queen telegraphed from Osborne: "I wish to say how much I admired your fine speech.—V.R.I.". That is not all. Mr. Choate, the American ambassador, unusually qualified in these matters, considered the speech "the finest he had ever heard in England".[1] Congratulations flowed in by all posts.

On the vote of censure, Ministers had a majority of 213—"No", 352; "Aye", 139. Idle to deny that the victor was happy and renewed. Within himself—we have marked it many times—no person less resembled the machine-man universally imagined abroad and too commonly at home. He lived on temperament, and in his sixty-fourth year he loved these returns of sanguine vitality.

V

The lucky stars were with him. In the very week after the Parliamentary reassertion of his ascendancy the whole aspect of the war itself was altered by our new military leadership. Roberts and Kitchener had arrived at Cape Town a month before. More than twenty years after, Milner in conversation described to the present writer the weeks of dreary suspense and the

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, February 10, 1900.

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thrilling audacity of the *dénouement*. The old Field-Marshal at the outset met a calamity—the loss of his transport captured by De Wet—which might well have paralysed any good soldier of a lesser stamp. Roberts went on.[1]

When Roberts landed Kitchener stayed on board until his Chief had received all the honours. When Roberts came on the scene there was something about the little man that put fresh heart and hope into everybody. He had lost his only son; he never mentioned it. For weeks nothing whatever seemed to happen. Then came the great sweep to Bloemfontein, which decided the end, and changed the face of world-politics in a fortnight. After all his planning, he lost his transport on the second day. His staggering decision to go on without it was the greatest proof of his mettle as a leader.

At home and overseas the new touch was electrical. Lord Roberts no more foresaw the possibilities of guerilla in South Africa than did Napoleon in Spain, but the sweep of his course was a sound as well as splendid operation. His winged strategy, as that word was then pardonably used by comparison with Buller's unwieldy fumbling, made a magical change in the nation's mood, disconcerted Anglophobia abroad, and prospered Chamberlain's fortunes.

A few days after the close of the debate on the Address (February 9) Roberts opened his outflanking campaign. The military sequel may be calendared to save description:

February 15. Lord Roberts enters the Orange Free State.
„ 15. Relief of Kimberley.
„ 16. Cronje abandons position at Magersfontein.
„ 17. His retreat cut off at Paardeberg.
„ 27. Cronje surrenders. Over 4000 prisoners.
„ 28. Relief of Ladysmith.
March 5. Boer overtures for peace.
„ 12. British Government refuses the peace overtures.
„ 13. Capture of Bloemfontein.—Boer delegates embark at Lourenço Marques.

[1] February 15, Convoy captured at Waterval when "loss to the amount of 176 wagon-loads of provisions was the result of De Wet's enterprise" (Lucas, *Historical Geography of South Africa*, Part II. pp. 195-196).

Mid-March to beginning of May. Lord Roberts, much against his will, must halt for seven weeks to rehorse and reorganise for the further sweep. The Boers begin guerilla tactics.

May 3. Roberts resumes his advance on the Transvaal.

„ 11. Chamberlain at Birmingham announces the Government's intention to annex the Republics.

„ 17. Relief of Mafeking.

„ 31. Capture of Johannesburg.

June 5. The British enter Pretoria.[1]

When besiegements and defeats were succeeded by deliverances and victories—when the advance stretched on past Bloemfontein to Johannesburg and Pretoria—Chamberlain, distinguished from the unforgiven Government he upheld, became for a long period the political hero of the Unionist majority as Lord Roberts at that time was the military idol of the people.

The relief of Kimberley was in a moral sense the relief of the whole nation at home after four months of pent-up feeling; but however bitterly disappointing to the Boers it left their fighting strength untouched. As Chamberlain said, a "red letter day at last" came with the surrender at Paardeberg of stubborn Cronje and his brave 4000. The night before, when the Colonial Secretary had been dining in the House of Commons with a chief colleague and other friends, someone amongst the party said, "Wouldn't it be splendid if something could be done to-morrow on the anniversary of Majuba?" Mr. Balfour: "Oh, too good. No—we mustn't ask for it."[2] But it was so.

Twenty-four hours more, and Ladysmith was free. During Buller's failures Chamberlain sometimes dreaded the worst for the town. The gossiping Governor of Natal's last report was that Ladysmith was "living on chevril, quasi-bovril made of horses and mules".[3] At last Buller carried Hlangwane Hill, which he ought to have taken at first. The British crossed the Tugela, broke by degrees through the main positions of the besiegers, and on February 28, the day after Paardeberg, Dundonald's

[1] Bülow's annotation: "In an English advance to Pretoria no one believes. But who knows?" (*Grosse Politik*, vol. xv. p. 434, December 26, 1899).

[2] Mrs. Chamberlain's Letters to America, February 27, 1900.

[3] Hely Hutchinson to the Colonial Secretary, February 17, 1900.

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horsemen joined hands with White's worn garrison. Always in England enthusiasm rises to the highest, not when an enemy is beaten, but when a staunch British resistance prevails. Cronje's surrender had been very soberly taken at home, but the grit of the race had been in White's defence. Upon his deliverance ordinary persons, especially young persons, felt a joyous impulse to demonstrate. In South Kensington art students and other little crowds marched to 40 Prince's Gardens, but Chamberlain was at a Cabinet, and his son Austen had to deputise from the balcony. "Joe is more like himself than I have seen him for months," says his wife. The end of the Ladysmith entanglement lifted a load from his mind. At Christmas, two months before, many military experts in Europe as well as the Boers themselves expected that Ladysmith would be another Yorktown.

These were the most touching days of Victoria's relations with her people. When the venerable Lady decided to drive through London[1] there were enormous crowds full of emotion. Both Houses sent word that they would like to pay homage in a body. Drawn up in the courtyard before Buckingham Palace they sang "God save the Queen", and she was moved when Chamberlain, in Balfour's absence, was called up to speak to her for the Commons. The chords were deeper now than in the unawakened time of the Jubilee pageants already so far away, part of a vanished age of illusion.

By now, Roberts at Bloemfontein is making the long pause before the next advance to Pretoria. "If only little Mafeking were relieved!" This is the Colonial Secretary's constant wish, and the longing of the country. Mafeking had done what seemed beyond possibility at the outset. For seven months, thanks to a commander with a spice of genius, it had held the besiegers at bay. Had Baden-Powell been a Boer, how fairly we all would have praised him. Because of its farness, loneliness and smallness; because of the humorous ingenuity of the long defence —this beleaguered village in Bechuanaland became the ewe lamb of the Empire. All eyes were fixed on it when both Kimberley and Ladysmith were free. By the middle of May every day counted. In spite of the seven months' resistance must

[1] On two successive days, March 8 and 9.

Mafeking fall? The large majority of men and women thought of nothing else.

There was an unfounded rumour though only a little ahead of the fact, that the beloved outpost was saved. Coming out from the old War Office in Pall Mall Chamberlain was recognised. The word spread; a crowd surrounded him in a moment; making a circle they sang "God save the Queen"; and the police had to clear a way for his departure in a hansom cab. For it was still the age of horses; and the singular vehicle which now seems prehistoric, though Disraeli called it "the gondola of London", was still in full vogue.

Could Baden-Powell hold out for another week? Three days of acute suspense followed the premature jubilation in Pall Mall. On Friday, May 17, came the news that the siege was raised. Baden-Powell had held out for 217 days and won.

VI

London immediately went mad and went "mafficking". That opprobrious word requires some rational consideration here. Filled by the anti-war party with saturnalian suggestion, it was used then and for years after to prejudice Chamberlain and the whole spirit of Imperialism. Most foreign hostility no doubt was quick to pounce on any cue; but even moderate opinion abroad was led to deplore our degeneration.

Let us see what happened. By one spontaneous impulse the whole nation and the whole race under the flag burst into rejoicing, just as they would have done years before had Gordon been found living at Khartum. But London went wild with a difference. Arriving late in the evening the news spread like the wind. Enormous crowds gathered; they seemed to rise out of the ground; so swiftly had these dense masses swarmed by all means of access into the main centres and thoroughfares of the metropolis. That night the labyrinth of London seemed to give up its millions to view. From East End to West End, from the Bank to Park Lane, they packed the streets with huge humanity, cheering and singing. Sometimes under opposite pressures immense multitudes found themselves unable to move an inch. Again, they surged this way and that by slow degrees,

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contrary currents working through each other and roaring like a storm.

How was this prodigious outpouring of people turned to vulgarity? The street hawkers did it. They were ready with the peacocks' feathers and the little trumpets seized upon by the young hobbledehoys of both sexes, shouting their music hall catch-words and refrains. All this was just like the ordinary popular vulgarities of Bank Holiday nights as then celebrated, only stupendously magnified. The English-speaking democracies were and are sober and enduring in adversity, but given to riotous hilarity and uncouth horseplay in their tumults of rejoicing after pent-up anxiety. The eighteenth century mobs were coarser though smaller.

The orgies of rejoicing because little Mafeking too was delivered and Baden Powell had scored 217 "not out" were at heart as good-humoured as mighty, and implied no deterioration in national character. That was to show, first, the same soundness during the darker ordeal of the World War and then the same faults when the still vaster, more unbridled "mafficking" of Armistice Day in November 1918 saddened anew the hearts of so many and so many whose dearest would return no more. Since party began in the seventeenth century, the increasing vulgarity or degeneracy of Britain has been frequently lamented by each party when in Opposition. Anti-war Liberals who in May 1900 regarded Mafeking night as a revelation of national debasement proclaimed when they came to their own at the polls years later that we remained an exemplary people.

At Mafeking, by exception, the pluck and wits of a British handful had won against the odds. It was a peculiar satisfaction to the British soul. It meant not crowing over the enemy but delighting in a signal proof of British quality man for man. Throughout the Empire popular instinct was the same.

VII

In the House of Commons during these same months, and to the end of that Session and of that Parliament, debate after debate strengthened the Colonial Secretary's hand. His enemies

overdid it. They called forth all his powers, and worked a revulsion in his favour. We have described how at the outset he won the case for the Government. At that time he had yet to win his own. He did win it in another fortnight. The account has been deferred so as not to deflect the main narrative of intermingled military and Ministerial fortunes.

The episode now recalled is outstanding in this book as showing the range of Chamberlain's resources in debate. The anti-war party had been sedulous as never before in collecting material and elaborating inferences. They were confident of inflicting lasting damage. On Tuesday, February 20, Mr. D. A. Thomas, afterwards Lord Rhondda, moved for "a full enquiry to be made into the origin and circumstances of the conspiracy against the Transvaal Government and of the incursion into the South African Republic by an armed force in 1895".

Again the House was packed above and below. Announcements that the galleries were "full" were put up in the outer lobby to the disappointment of applicants who had not come early. The Opposition, united or nearly against Chamberlain, though on little else under the sun, were out for a Roman holiday. But for all his high ability Mr. D. A. Thomas never found himself in the Commons. Overweighted with preparation, encumbered, tedious, he "stumbled through his notes aided by innumerable glasses of water".[1] Not so his adept seconder, another Welsh member, "Sam" Evans, afterwards Solicitor-General, and later a Judge. He is forgotten now, as politicians of all but the highest power are forgotten like so many actors and actresses acclaimed in their day; but in the House he could be as dexterous in attack as agreeable in society. Like the mover, he guarded himself from making against the Colonial Secretary any direct charge of complicity in the Raid. But then, with a mastery of all convenient material, he used the most insidious arts of suggestion to imply what he had disclaimed. He enraptured the Radical and the Irish benches; the Unionists' ranks were uncomfortable. To old arguments about the whitewashing of Rhodes and "missing telegrams", Evans added references to documents lately disclosed in Brussels.

We must recall the circumstances of that publication by the

[1] *Westminster Gazette*, February 21, 1900.

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Indépendance Belge. The documents stolen by a clerk from Mr. Bourchier Hawksley's safe were bought ultimately by Dr. Leyds for £100. At the beginning of the transactions they were purchased by Dr. Clark, M.P. for Caithness, formerly an official agent of the Transvaal, and soon afterwards shown to have been in very mischievous communication with Pretoria just before the war.

Nearly two hours of Parliamentary time were given to the emission of poison-gas—using later language here to express what Chamberlain felt. He sat with folded arms, but there was that about him to tell the House that a storm was brewing. Ominous was one sultry interjection across the floor. When the mover said with marked intention, referring to the late Mr. Fairfield of the Colonial Office, "dead men tell no tales", Chamberlain's peculiar incisive whisper, breathed with indescribable bitterness, set the Unionists shouting: "Dead men cannot reply".

When his turn came to speak he was pale with passion, but "it did not rise above the neck", to repeat again Napoleon's word so applicable to the Colonial Minister. Never more consecutive in analysis, he spoke for less than forty minutes without a single note, and was devastating. Volcanic for once, said the House. As this reply reads even now in Hansard there is not a dead word. Nothing is harder in Parliamentary debate than to deal well with hinted innuendo and all the familiar resources of oblique defamation.

> Charges—no, not charges—insinuations, innuendos . . . based on suspicions and imputations which even those who repeat and publish them dare not pretend that they themselves believe. . . .
>
> They say I exonerated Mr. Rhodes. . . . The charge was that he had done this thing . . . with the most sordid motive, with the object of benefiting himself pecuniarily, with the object of promoting his Stock Exchange speculations and of raising the value of his property. . . . While I condemned Mr. Rhodes as strongly as anybody else for the offence he had really committed, I absolved him absolutely of the offence he had not committed, which would have tainted his personal honour.
>
> It appears a further enquiry is to be asked for on account of that precious collection of documents which was published in the *Indépendance Belge*. They were stolen . . . then hawked about London to the news-

papers holding different politics from my own, as well as to those of my side, and none of them would touch them even with the tongs. . . .

The hon. gentlemen opposite ask for an enquiry. They do not want an enquiry; they want an execution. . . .

Let them do their worst. I am perfectly ready to rely on the good sense and generosity of this House and of my countrymen outside; and I venture to say that this attack and all the attacks which have preceded it, will recoil upon the shoulders of those who make them.[1]

"They do not want an enquiry: they want an execution." "Let them do their worst." At words like these wild cheering broke from the Unionist side. To suggest the movement and accent of the speech these quoted passages are given, but they do not show the power and ingenuity of his counter-attack. He fell on flank and rear of his assailants.

So the onslaught was routed. Harcourt following, while members shuffled out, threw all the blame on Rhodes and his minions. Campbell-Bannerman pressed for a new enquiry to dispel the world's suspicions—a perfect Opposition formula. Balfour, winding up the debate, found the word for Unionist feeling when, at the last moment allowed by the clock, he concluded another generous defence of his colleague by declaring that Chamberlain's political enemies were taking advantage of the war situation to "stab him in the back".

Dinner in the House was gay that evening. "He got quite the best of them", wrote Choate, the American Ambassador, who had listened from the diplomatists' gallery. George Wyndham exclaimed, "The finest debating speech I ever heard—not a note—wonderful". And the Irish benches admired as never before in debate the man they longed to slay. John Redmond, who at heart loved the Empire and did not much love Liberalism as then existing, was called out in the middle of the speech and, "all smiles", remarked to Anstruther, the Unionist Whip, "He is giving those fellows a hell of a time". Many other Irish members that night forgot their vendetta and appreciated like connoisseurs the technique of so great a fighter.

Next day newspapers of both parties signalised this feat of arms. "It was a splendid exhibition of parliamentary genius,"

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxix. cols. 633-644 (February 20, 1900).

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wrote the old *St. James's Gazette*, "and cannot fail to enhance even Mr. Chamberlain's reputation and to strengthen and consolidate his position in the party and the country." On the other side the *Daily Chronicle*, which loved him not and refused to be convinced by his defence, wrote, "It was a *tour de force*, a supreme effort, and it must be said that it was a brilliant rhetorical feat however much or little it answered the point of the indictment". Another Liberal opponent testified in the old *Westminster Gazette*: "The immediate result as far as his own supporters were concerned was electrical. Encouraged by his magnificent display of rhetoric they cheered him to the echo". The best of all the comments was pictorial—E. T. Reed's cartoon, "A Difficult Kopje", where Chamberlain was shown as a high rock topped by his magnified head, while spent and bent with vain efforts the assailants trudged away.[1]

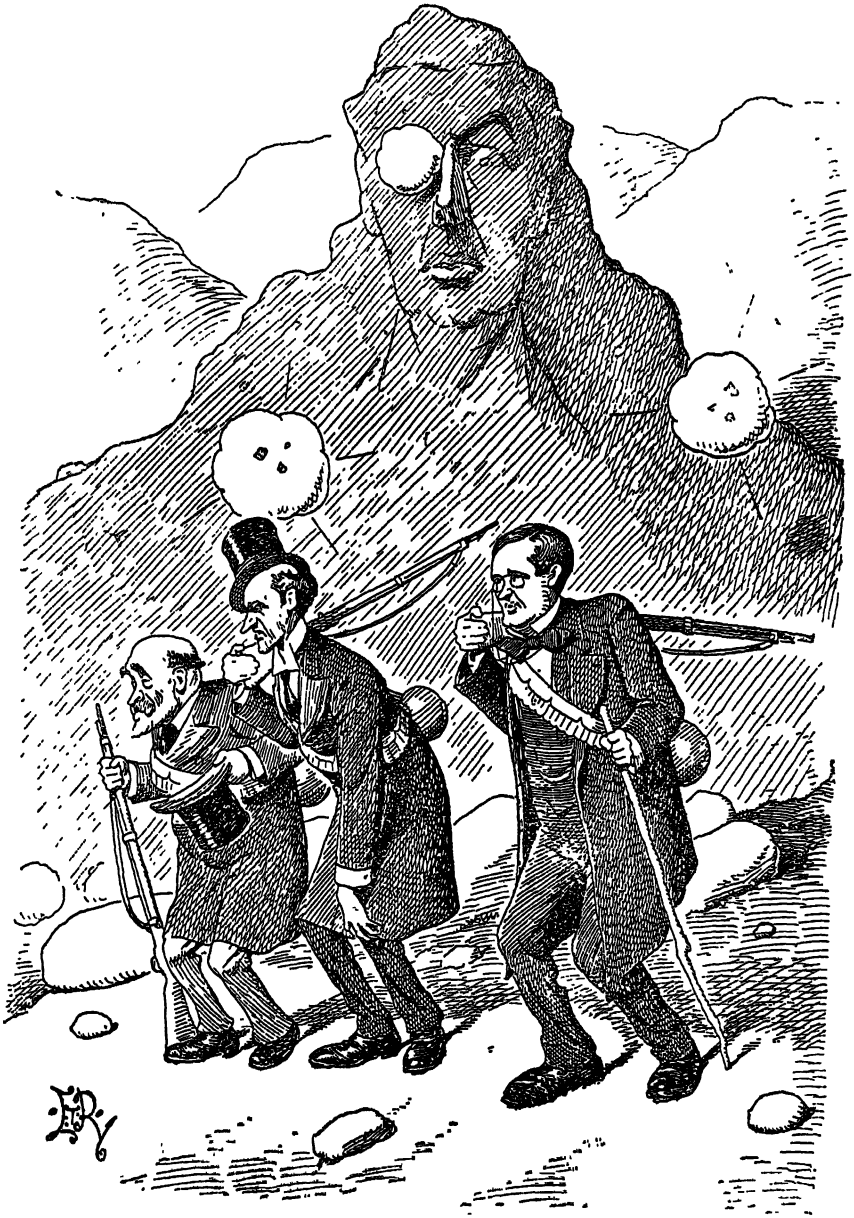
But it did not end there. Chamberlain could not forgive the latest effort of the vendetta not only to destroy his political life but to blast his personal honour. No Liberal Imperialist defended him. All the Opposition sections worked to weaken his hands in the war and to exclude him from the settlement. As they were out for his political life he was henceforth out for theirs. He meant to bring them to the polls and to make this last full session of the nineteenth century the last of this Parliament.

VIII

The next incident was as embittering, though outside the House. Pleased when Nonconformists invited him to luncheon in connection with the annual celebration of their founder at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, he had no thought of making a party speech. C. P. Scott's *Manchester Guardian*—then with intense conviction taking all risks on the unpopular side—denounced this programme as a moral betrayal.

The President of the Conference and his advisers felt constrained to cancel their invitation. A split was threatened. At first they wished the Colonial Secretary to get them out of their predicament by writing to say that the pressure on his time

[1] Full-page illustration in *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, 1895-1900, by H. W. Lucy, p. 341.



A DIFFICULT KOPJE

(MR. LABOUCHERE, MR. S. EVANS, AND MR. D. THOMAS)

From the cartoon by E. T. Reed appearing in *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, by Henry W. Lucy. Reproduced by permission of Messrs. J. W. Arrowsmith, Ltd.

prevented him from keeping his engagement. He insisted that the real circumstances should be publicly explained. Letters were exchanged and sent to the newspapers.[1] "A quite unjustifiable party-political construction", said a Wesleyan apologist, "has been put upon the arrangement by a number of Methodists, who are under the delusion that the luncheon was intended to commit the Methodist Church to a particular political party."

Chamberlain's answer was caustic. He remarks that "the great majority of Methodists share the opinions of their co-religionists in South Africa as expressed by the Synods of the Cape of Good Hope and Natal districts, and believe the war to be both just and inevitable". But as "the action of the dissentients has had the result of giving a political character to the proceedings which neither you nor I intended . . . I have no hesitation in asking you to consider my acceptance of your invitation as withdrawn".[2]

Amongst Wesleyans he had a staunch body of indignant friends. Some months afterwards the President of Conference invited him to a private dinner, where nearly fifty people were present, and the occasion was a rare success. He described it himself in a letter to his wife:

House of Commons, July 5.— . . . I made them (with notes) a "memorable address", according to Dr. Rigg, the G.O.M. of the Wesleyans. I spoke of the war, of missionaries as a factor in the work of civilisation jointly with soldiers and traders, and of John Wesley's character and work. I think they were really pleased. The chairman, the Rev. F. Macdonald, spoke very well, so did others more briefly. I should say that the speaking was very much above the average. Of course no reporters were present.

We may see from this how much he liked an atmosphere recalling the old days when he was the political leader of all the Nonconformists, and they expected him to become a Prime Minister who would disestablish the Church.

[1] February 28, 1900.

[2] Correspondence between Chamberlain and the Rev. T. E. Westerdale, *The Times*, February 28, 1900.

CHAPTER LXXII

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION AND IMPERIAL UNITY

(1900)

"A CONSTITUTION for a Continent"—The Australian Commonwealth Bill and the Imperial Parliament—Chamberlain and the Envoys—Demand for "The Bill, the Whole Bill, and Nothing but the Bill"—Chamberlain and Amendment as to Right of Appeal to the Privy Council—The "Legal Link" of Empire—The Struggle on Clause 74—A Crisis and a Happy Compromise—How the Commonwealth Bill was Introduced and Carried—"After Australia, South Africa"—The Future of the Empire?

I

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PARLIAMENT relaxed as our arms prospered and final victory seemed near. Except for the supplementary Act extending Workmen's Compensation for Accidents to agricultural labourers, there was no approach to first-class legislation in domestic affairs. More than ever was this Chamberlain's session, when he introduced and carried through all stages a measure of the first magnitude. It was the Bill for Australian Federation—the greatest constructive event in the general history of the Empire since Canadian Confederation a generation before.

When the Commonwealth Constitution was presented for the Queen's sanction he was concerned closely with one provision touching the links of Empire.

From the day he took charge of his department he hoped to see the movement for Australian unity crowned with success during his term of office. That cause, in the way of great causes, was severely delayed, sometimes threatened; but its advocates were invigorated by difficulty and its advance gained momentum. Five out of the six Colonies agreed at last upon a plan of federation. Not only so; though Western Australia

still stood out on details, it was certain before long to come in. In the autumn of 1899, overshadowed at home by the South African crisis, the Colonial Secretary received from the farthest continent an address to the Queen. All the Australian legislatures except that of the "far West" prayed Her Majesty for the enactment of the Commonwealth Bill. That measure in the next place was examined by the Law Officers of the Crown. They marked some verbal flaws and noted one matter of substantial concern.

At this the Colonial Minister telegraphed to Australia his hope that delegates were coming home to advise and assist during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. All the federating Colonies were asked to send representatives. They reached London in March 1900. Chamberlain found amongst them some of the stoutest negotiators he had met in his life.

It was no small matter that social relations between the Minister and the delegation were excellent. Nothing had proved happier in result than the pre-eminent distinction he had insisted upon for the Colonial statesmen in the Jubilee ceremonies. Now he presented the Australian envoys to the Queen at Windsor, showed them every official honour, and entertained them in his own frank way. They were the lions of the season—or, better still, its lion-cubs—welcomed by the City Companies and other institutions, by the Clubs of both parties, by private hosts and hostesses. This not only because of their historic mission but because Australia's part in the war filled the mother country with pride and affection.

II

However friendly might be personal intercourse between Chamberlain and the delegates the struggle on the difference of principle was nothing less than dour. Protracted for more than two months it at one time seemed insoluble without surrender on one side or the other.

The Commonwealth Bill was the most democratic Constitution yet framed in the modern world. On that account Chamberlain did not and could not think of allowing it to be meddled with by crusted Conservatism in either House of

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Parliament. He was concerned with Imperial relationships and nothing else. Out of no less than 128 clauses in the proposed Statute to create a united Australia he took serious issue on one alone. "Clause 74" weakened a traditional tie of the Empire by restricting that right of appeal to Her Majesty in Council at Westminster which had hitherto existed throughout the Queen's dominions; and particular words seemed to foreshadow a further weakening. In the Commonwealth Bill, "Clause 74" read as follows:

> No appeal shall be permitted to the Queen in Council in any matter involving the interpretation of this Constitution or of the Constitution of a State, unless the public interests of some part of Her Majesty's Dominions other than the Commonwealth or a State are involved.
>
> Except as provided in this section, this Constitution shall not impair any right which the Queen may be pleased to exercise, by virtue of her Royal prerogative, to grant special leave of appeal from the High Court to Her Majesty in Council. *But the Parliament may make laws limiting the matters in which such leave may be asked.*[1]

Now, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council might be in externals "the dowdy Court of Downing Street", but to insight it was majestic. The scope of its duties was as world-wide as the Empire, and to that responsibility its impartial weight was acknowledged to be equal.

In the Unionist Cabinet the Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, one of the redoubtable Victorians, was especially disturbed by the proposition that our legal connection with federated Australia should become more slender than with any other part of Her Majesty's dominions. Canadian Confederation for instance had conspicuously maintained the link which Australia's federal statute proposed to attenuate. Without endangering good relations, much less jeopardising the whole Commonwealth Bill, Chamberlain meant to try his hardest to win over the Australian envoys to his view.

But the three principal delegates were predetermined in the opposite sense. They had concerted their resistance, and they were all both men of mark and lawyers. New South Wales was

[1] The biographer's italics.

represented by Edmund Barton, afterwards first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, a very able man, of urbane habit but by no means of a yielding mind on the matter in hand. Victoria's spokesman was Alfred Deakin, possessed by that concentrated intensity of conviction which aided to make him one of the most gifted orators alive. Charles Cameron Kingston of South Australia was doughty and combustible. All three wished the Imperial Parliament to pass the Bill word for word as framed in Australia.

Their case was in truth as strong as their intentions were resolute. They were pioneers of the new colonial nationalism which began to mark a far-reaching change in the conception of relations with the mother country and was to prevail ultimately in all self-governing communities. Further, they had the pride of paternity. They were "fathers of the Constitution" in the old American sense. The Commonwealth Bill was the result of ten years' study and work, struggle and adjustment. In repeated Conventions, in local legislatures, in the press it had been exhaustively discussed. In the adhering colonies it had been adopted on referendum by the people themselves, and for the most part by overwhelming majorities.

The Constitution which the Queen was now prayed to grant followed in some respects the example of the United States rather than of Canada. Especially the leaders of Australian nationalism saw that in their continent, according to a celebrated precedent in the United States, the further shaping and the general working of the Constitution would be vitally influenced by judicial interpretation. That interpretation, as they held, ought to be made in their own atmosphere, by their own Federal Court; and could not be safely entrusted to a tribunal, ten thousand miles away, neither properly acquainted with local conditions nor guided by the spirit of Australian nationalism, if indeed capable of understanding it at all.

It had been proposed at one time in the federation debates to abolish altogether the right of appeal to the Privy Council. The more limited restriction applying to exclusively Australian cases but not to inter-Imperial interests seemed to the chief framers of the Commonwealth Bill rather a concession to the mother country than a rebuff. Barton, Deakin, Kingston—supported by

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the less prominent delegate of a fourth Colony, Sir Philip Fysh of Tasmania—took up the position that they represented a final decision of their States and could not go behind it. Australia's right to interpret her own Constitution with respect to all her own affairs was of the very essence of self-government. In short, following a robust British example, they demanded "the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill".

III

Chamberlain, like all the British Cabinet, as advised by its Law Officers, sought to preserve on Canadian lines an undiminished right of appeal to the Privy Council. It is trivially absurd to suggest that he was bent on asserting his personal will. By virtue of his office he was the chief trustee for inter-Imperial relations, and he was influenced by nothing but a conviction as firm and honourable as that of the Australian nationalist spokesmen. When Barton, Deakin and Kingston stood fast upon their ground of doctrine and declined to consider even the amendment of one clause out of 128 clauses, the Colonial Secretary was astonished and thought it unreasonable.

And another thing must be well understood. This was no case of Chamberlain against Australia. He would have been the last man to undertake a controversy of that nature. It did not seem so certain that the majority of the Australian people would uphold unyielding insistence upon a nationalist logic which was one-sided in effect. Clearly, decisions in Australia, nominally concerning the new Commonwealth alone, might in fact disturb inter-Imperial interests despite some safeguarding words offered in the Bill. This, for instance, might occur through maritime legislation, or in affairs of the South Seas touching the Empire's foreign policy. On that argument Chamberlain found himself strongly reinforced by opinion overseas. Before the end of the controversy Sir Henry de Villiers, Chief Justice of the Cape, himself a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, said that any restriction of its powers would be a mistake in itself and of bad example. From the first, New Zealand advocated the maintenance of the full right of appeal. Emphatic in the same sense was Western

Australia, still standing out for better terms as a condition of federation. Amongst the adhering Colonies themselves Queensland was more and more in favour of Chamberlain's wish. Including New Zealand, he had on his side the majority of opinion in three Australasian Colonies out of seven. Not only so. As he remarked later: "What about New South Wales? . . . When the Constitution was submitted to the Legislature of New South Wales, both Houses passed resolutions urging amendments to maintain the right of appeal. They were subsequently outvoted in the Convention, but their opinion remains, and I think it is also the opinion of the majority of the people."[1]

On April 5 a conference of delegates representing all the Australasian Colonies including New Zealand was held at the Colonial Office. There was no approach to agreement.[2] That night the Colonial Secretary telegraphed to all the five federating Colonies urging with compact vigour that the instructions to the delegates should be enlarged in a manner enabling them to accept amendments. He put the issue in terms both explicit and conciliatory. "Any desire or intention to interfere in any manner involving interests exclusively Australian is disclaimed by Her Majesty's Government, but they are confident that full weight will be given to their suggestion by your Ministers when urged on behalf of the interests of the United Kingdom, or as trustees for the Empire at large." The Premiers concerned replied that they had no power to authorise amendments, yet their language did not shut the door against compromise.

His procedure put on their mettle the Australian stalwarts in London. Not only did they implore their Premiers to stand firm. Barton, Deakin and Kingston took their courage in their hands, and resolved on their own responsibility to brusque the affair. They presented the Colonial Secretary with another able memorandum repelling on principle any amendment whatever of their Constitution and reaffirming their original demand for "the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill".[3]

[1] Chamberlain's speech introducing the Commonwealth of Australia Bill, House of Commons, May 14, 1900. Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxiii. col. 71.

[2] For more details of the negotiations than can be given here see Quick and Garran, *Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth* (Sydney and Melbourne, 1901), pp. 228-249.

[3] Quick and Garran, pp. 238-240.

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There they went too far and were checked. The Queensland delegate, Dickson, separated himself from his colleagues. He held that the arguments of Her Majesty's Law Officers for the maintenance of plenary appeal were unanswerable. There were other signs in the same sense. The seven Chief Justices of the Australian Colonies unanimously supported the old right of appeal. The preponderance of opinion in the newspapers of Australia moved in favour of the Colonial Secretary's argument. Chambers of Commerce and other representatives of trade, with banks, insurance corporations, and other business interests, pronounced for unrestricted recourse to the Privy Council. We may note the admission of an Australian writer wholly out of sympathy with Chamberlain's desire: "The restriction of appeals had never really been popular there. A wave of Imperialism was sweeping over the Continent—the South African War, be it remembered, was then being waged—and to sever a tie however slight between Britain and Australia seemed to many persons undesirable."[1]

The Colonial Secretary might well presume that it was he who represented a potential majority of Australian opinion; or at least that there was no such authoritative unanimity as would make it unmistakeably advisable for the British Government, against its own conviction, to recommend the Commonwealth Bill without change of a syllable or a comma. Still the Australian ironsides of constitution-making would not budge a hair's-breadth from their dogma of the sacrosanctity of the syllables and the untouchability of the commas. Amicable manners were preserved, a good deal of strong feeling was smothered, but principles were in full clash.

Something had to be done, and the Colonial Minister was not the man to shrink. He thought it right "at all events to take time and for the present, at any rate, to retain the right of appeal as it now exists".[2] He resolved to introduce the federating statute but to reject the taboo. But this strong step was meant to induce further negotiation, not preclude it.

[1] Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 203.

[2] His speech of May 14. A further intention, not insisted upon in the end, was a specific declaration in the opening paragraphs of the Bill that the Colonial Laws Validity Act should apply. Under that Act British law overrode Colonial law on any matter concerning the whole Empire.

IV

On May 14, 1900, the Colonial Secretary brought in the "Commonwealth of Australia Bill" embodying the first and only Constitution that has ever been framed for a whole continent. His speech took up an hour and three-quarters. Dealing unavoidably with a complicated mass of detail, it was a rare effort of exposition sustained with that steady statesman-like discrimination which is hard to blend with a continuous clarity.

It was one of the high days of all his career. A generation had passed since Lord Carnarvon introduced the British North America Act to establish the Confederation of Canada. For many years, as we may remember, Chamberlain had warned European Powers that Australasian nationalism would have to be reckoned with some day in all the waters of the Southern hemisphere.

Now, he distinguished lucidly between two principles. "On the one hand, we have accepted without demur, and we shall ask the House of Commons to accept, every point in this Bill, every word, every line, every clause which deals exclusively with the interests of Australia." But where the Bill touched interests outside Australia the trusteeship for the whole Empire held by the British Government and by the Imperial Parliament came justly into play. He showed how large a part of public feeling went with him in Australia itself as in the rest of the Empire. Towards the end he explained his desire to create at Westminster a greater Supreme Court.

> In the conference which Her Majesty's Government held with the delegates from Australia allusion was made to a desire which has long been entertained by Her Majesty's Government to reconsider the constitution of the Supreme Court of the Empire. What the Lord Chancellor as representing specially the Government in this matter has had in view has been an amalgamation of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council with the appeal jurisdiction of the House of Lords.

This highest ideal could not be realised at once. Meanwhile Her Majesty's Government had an intermediate plan. They designed to strengthen the Privy Council by adding to it more systematically than in the past judicial representatives of the

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self-governing Colonies and India. Henceforth those members would receive life peerages, they would act as Lords of Appeal for seven years, and during that period would be paid by the Imperial Exchequer.

There was no peroration such as any other statesman, major or minor, would have supplied upon an occasion so tempting. In one closing sentence he affirmed that "no more important measure of legislation has ever been presented to Parliament and that nothing throughout the whole course of the Queen's reign will be a more beneficent feature of that long and glorious history".

In explicit terms this speech more than thirty years ago laid down those principles of free association within the Empire which have been universally accepted in our day. When Australia's mind was made up conclusively her wish, whatever it might be, must be fulfilled so far as it concerned her own affairs:

> We have got to a point in our relations with our self-governing Colonies in which I think we recognise once for all that these relations depend entirely on their free will and absolute consent. The links between us at the present time are very slight. Almost a touch might snap them; but slender and slight as they are—although we wish and although I hope that they will become stronger—still if they are felt irksome in any one of our great Colonies we shall not force them to wear them.
>
> One of these ancient links is precisely this right of appeal of every subject to Her Majesty the Queen in Council. The Bill weakens it. There is no doubt about that. . . . I am sure the House will feel that there is no man in the House who is more anxious to maintain the good feeling between ourselves and the Colonies than I. Ever since I have been in office that has been my chief desire. In a case of this kind nothing is more easy than to concede, nothing is more difficult than to refuse. . . .[1]

But Oppositions must live, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman popped up to make the worst of it. Regardless or uninformed of the real state of Australian opinion, he censured this of all speeches as "in effect—though I agree not in intention—giving an open rebuff to the Australian people." Just afterwards, it is edifying to note, another Liberal leader, Sir Henry Fowler, came up to the Colonial Secretary and remarked, "It was a magnifi-

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxiii. cols. 46-75 (May 14, 1900).

cent speech. Mr. Gladstone in his best days could not have excelled it."[1] But the exposition which had required an hour and three-quarters by no means finished that heavy day's work. When he sat down the dispute remained. An immediate sequel brought about the happy solution.

V

For the evening after his introduction of the Bill the Colonial Minister had invited the chief Australian delegates to dine with him at the House of Commons in company with Arthur Balfour, Gerald Balfour and John Morley.

He had veiled his anxiety. Sympathetic interpretation of overseas opinion had been so far his pleasure and his strength. It was utterly disagreeable to have to fight men like Barton, Deakin and Kingston. And to have to do it during the South African War when the services of the Australian contingents at the front were felt by him as not only part of his pride but part of his life. A struggle against the Opposition at home and against half Australia or perhaps more—to what good could this come?

At the dinner that evening goodwill on both sides brought into view the lucky compromise. The Australian nationalists who were his guests recognised at last that some amendment must be accepted. The Colonial Secretary in his speech that afternoon had repudiated once more any pretension to meddle with Australian control of Australian affairs. As frankly, the delegates now repudiated in their turn any intention to claim sovereign decision on matters touching inter-Imperial relations or foreign policy.

When the little party separated the settlement was in sight. But what with a speech so onerous and what with the resumed arguments at dinner, Chamberlain confessed late that night, "I feel as if I had walked thirty miles".

Three days later the Colonial Secretary had another meeting with Barton, Deakin and Kingston, and settlement was assured. The first draft of a new Clause 74 was agreed upon and it was

[1] The full text of the speech is reprinted by Professor Berriedale Keith in *Selected Speeches and Documents on British Colonial Policy* (Oxford University Press), vol. ii. pp. 337-381.

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afterwards improved.[1] The new Commonwealth would be as free as the United States of America to interpret its Constitution as regards central powers and State rights. Otherwise the appellate jurisdiction of the Privy Council could not be limited without the consent of the Imperial Government.

When moving the second reading of the Bill on Monday, May 21, Chamberlain announced the settlement amidst the general cheers of the House of Commons. He showed in one telling sentence how the knot had been cut. "The effect of this understanding will be that Clause 74 will be exactly reversed: that whereas in the original clause, appeal was to cease in all cases except where the public interests of some portion of Her Majesty's dominions outside Australia were concerned, in the clause, as we now propose to insert it, an appeal will lie in every case except in the cases where Australian interests alone are concerned."[2] Asquith, rising above the ordinary tone of party, extolled the wisdom and tact of a solution "which reflects equal honour on the Colonial Secretary and the Australian delegates"; and spoke of the Commonwealth Bill as "a measure which transcends in interest and magnitude almost any legislative proposal of our time".[3] The Colonial Minister in his different style some weeks before had enforced the same impression. "We, all of us . . . welcome the birth of a new nation to whose ever-growing greatness no man will dare to put a limit, and which is destined in the providence of God to play a great and increasing part in the history of the British race."[4] These are deep-felt words. It was confidently expected, then, that Australia and Canada alike would each comprise twenty or thirty millions of people by this hour of the twentieth century; and that their wealth, resources and spirit, added to their numbers, would make them equal by now to first-class Powers in the European sense.

VI

From that day to this there has been difference of feeling about the merits of the final agreement. Some writers represent

[1] Quick and Garran, pp. 246-248, for Australian criticism and subsequent verbal amendments in Committee.

[2] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxiii. col. 762 (May 21, 1900).

[3] *Ibid.* cols. 766-767.

[4] Meeting of the British Empire League, April 30, 1900.

that the Australian stalwarts danced a private fandango, so complete was their victory under colour of compromise. That the Colonial Secretary was too much for them is asserted by other accounts. He put it in his own way: "They have got what they wanted and I have got what I wanted". This is the spirit of the truth, though not literally exact. Neither side won all it originally strove for, but each gained what it most desired. The nationalist envoys abandoned their contention that their Bill as brought over should be regarded as sacrosanct and untouchable, and to be passed word for word by the Imperial Parliament. Chamberlain with strong regret, but wisely, had to sacrifice his first lively hope that the legal link with the mother country should be the same for Federal Australia as for the Canadian Dominion and the rest of the Empire. Many in Australia and New Zealand who had so widely supported his ideal now bitterly described his settlement as a surrender. It was the best available embodiment of mutual good sense at the time. Some dangers then feared have not arisen, though the hope of a greater Supreme Court for the whole Empire was not now to be fulfilled.

His colleagues were loud in praise of his steering skill, and he was lighter of heart when free from a responsibility so delicate and thankless. He writes to his wife:

June 21, 1900.— . . . I think the dinner last night was a success.[1] I got the speaking over by 10 P.M. and then for nearly two hours I "received" and was gracious to visitors from all parts of the world, from Hong Kong to Newfoundland, Abeokuta to Singapore, and from Malta to Penang. It was an extraordinary gathering which no other country could parallel.

Besides my office work to-day I have got the Australian Bill through the Committee stage triumphantly, no thanks to the Opposition, who tried to make mischief to the last, but were completely cowed to-day. I am sure my task was only rendered possible by the good personal relations between me and the delegates, and in this you have your share.

On July 9, 1900, Queen Victoria signed the "Constitution for a Continent" and the delegates carried home the table, inkstand

[1] He had presided over the first meeting of the Corona Club, formed to represent the Colonial Service at home and overseas. A large company assembled at the Hotel Cecil, June 20.

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and pen used by Her Majesty. It was amongst the last of her greater acts of State. Edmund Barton, who became a few months later the first Prime Minister of united Australia, knew how to harmonise nationalism and Imperialism when he said: "As long as we are part of the Empire and the Empire is at war with any Power whatever, it becomes our turn to declare the motto, 'For the Empire, right or wrong'".

VII

In Australia the Colonial Secretary would presently have to deal with one federal Administration instead of six separate Colonies. This would do more towards simplifying the conditions of Imperial union than anything since the Confederation of Canada more than thirty years before, when he first began to play a part in Birmingham politics. Might not the task be further simplified and its completion brought into sight by a conciliatory settlement in South Africa? And then? Inside and outside the House his incidental speeches showed that the career of this man was not likely to close before he had addressed himself in earnest somehow, whether he stood or fell, to a greater attempt in its kind than any British statesman had yet dared.

At the end of April 1900 the British Empire League at the old Hotel Cecil gave a banquet to celebrate the services of all the Colonial troops in the South African War and to welcome the Australian delegates. The gathering was of uncommon distinction. The Duke of Devonshire was in the chair. The Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister and the Colonial Minister were amongst the speakers, with representatives of both British and French Canada—Colonel Dennison and Mr. Tarte—as well as Australia. Some who were present thought that, for dignity and glow together, this occasion, in its kind, had not been surpassed in living recollection.

Already mentioned has been Chamberlain's allusion at this scene to the magnitude of the thoughts suggested by Australian federation. Lord Salisbury described the military rally of the Colonies as a magnificent spectacle which had taken the world by surprise. It had drawn the whole Empire together. But he uttered his admonition against haste in any effort to bring about

closer unity in form. Chamberlain commented: "I absolutely and entirely agree with every word that has fallen from the Prime Minister warning us against too great a pace, warning us against any attempt to bring about a union of hearts by artificial arrangements". His idea of sagacious pace was not quite the same as the Prime Minister's, but though he kept the goal vividly before him he was still far from foreseeing the course he ultimately adopted.

A Liberal member, Mr. Hedderwick, had moved, "That in the opinion of this House it is desirable, in the interests of the Empire, that the Colonies should be admitted to some direct representation in the Imperial Parliament".[1] The Colonial Secretary did not discern the promise of success on that path. He showed what perilous misunderstanding respecting taxation might be created overseas by any proposal to give the Colonies direct representation at Westminster. Even to excite discussion of that possibility would do harm. Then had the other plan, that of commercial alliance, become more feasible? He still saw no chance of solution except in Empire free trade. Even there experience had made him more reserved.

> If there is to be any kind of fiscal arrangement with the Colonies the only form which I myself think would be viewed with the slightest favour in this country would be an Imperial Zollverein in which there should be free trade between the whole Empire and duties of some kind as against other countries. But I have not proposed that; I have merely stated that that alone seems to me a proposal which might be seriously considered. . . . These proposals have been declared by the organs of hon. Members opposite to be an atrocious heresy—a heresy so great that the founders of it ought almost to be put in the pillory or carried to the stake.

Since his conference with the Colonial Premiers nearly three years before he had known that for overseas reasons Empire free trade was not possible. He still thinks that for British reasons commercial alliance on a basis of mutual preference is not possible. But he repeats that he is not orthodox. Something will have to be essayed. Though risks and impediments on every side compelled caution and delay, he adhered to his faith. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than during my period

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxi. cols. 1144-1153 (April 3, 1900).

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of office to promote or advance in any way that Imperial unity which has been the dream of all statesmen in recent times, who have devoted any attention to the subject, and which I am sanguine enough to believe it is not impossible to realise." He was musing from time to time upon the vital questions of when and how. Upon when to face the cause of closer unity as a practical issue; upon how to cope with it. No design for the whole Empire could be attempted until the Boer War was over and the reconciling settlement concluded. With Australian unity added to Canadian and with South African federation to come, it seemed, that now indeed before his eyes the columns were rising which would bear a crowning structure.

CHAPTER LXXIII

"DISSOLVING THE PRESENT PARLIAMENT AND DECLARING THE CALLING OF ANOTHER"

(1900)

STRAIN between the Colonial Secretary and the High Commissioner—Chamberlain refuses to Suspend the Cape Constitution—The Unionist Cabinet rejects "Peace with Independence"—The Political War in Cape Colony—Feeling at Westminster—Presentiments of Dissolution—Pretoria Occupied—The Case for an Appeal to the People—The Chinese Boxers intervene—End of "Chamberlain's Session"—Stroke and Counter-Stroke—"Correspondence Captured at Pretoria"—Government Contracts and Chamberlain's Honour—End of the Last Victorian Parliament.

I

FOR South African purposes and all wider interests of the Empire, Chamberlain now needed and purposed the assurance of a stable political basis for some years ahead. This could be created only by dissolving the Parliament elected five years before and renewing the Unionist majority. He was bent on asking the nation for another vote of confidence at a General Election to be held as soon as the military and diplomatic circumstances permitted and his colleagues could be convinced or persuaded.

We must distinguish here between the two elements in him—the realism in management and the imaginative conception. A keener or more ruthless eye to electioneering advantage than his never was known in the democratic politics of our own or any country. But his aims were always above the mechanism. It had been so from his earliest Radical days. When he entered municipal politics in support of George Dawson's idealism, he fastened upon the fact that to change Birmingham they had to

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sweep the civic polls. Later he organised the Caucus like Cromwell's New Model as a fighting instrument for a cause. Now, just as then, he planned a coup for aims above it. He intended indeed to frustrate all those—whether in South Africa, at home, or abroad—who hoped that a swing of the political pendulum would reverse the fortune of arms, or at least take the settlement out of his hands. But also his heart as well as his mind was fixed upon a healing peace.

II

Serious divergence opens between the Colonial Minister and the proconsul. For many months the strain on Milner is painful. Urgently he desires suspension of the Cape Constitution and rigour towards rebels. He longs for an administrative despotism iron at first, benevolent afterwards. Necessarily in his circumstances the High Commissioner is engrossed by South Africa alone.

For South African reasons and for wider reasons, Chamberlain will not have it. Once more he puts his foot down and keeps it down.

From the outset he was resolved, as we know, on conciliation after the war. As early as December 6, 1899—little suspecting that the next days would bring the setbacks of Black Week—he sat down in a mood both sanguine and earnest, and unbosomed himself to Cape Town. "We may see the whole movement collapse. I am therefore constantly thinking of the future." He never used a more typical word. All his life he was thinking of the future. Then he went on to outline his ideas. "What I suppose we all want to do is to give them as early as possible such Local Government as can safely be allowed to them." When this reached the High Commissioner at the darkest hour he must have smiled a little bitterly. He answered, "About the future. No use thinking now of anything but how to end the war successfully from a military point of view. . . . What are we to do with the constitution of the Colony? The rebels of to-day cannot surely be allowed just to turn round and become the voters of to-morrow. . . . Under the circumstances I cannot but feel that we must face some temporary suspension or amend-

ment of the Cape Constitution (after the precedent of Canada in 1835–40), and this must be done from home. . . .[1]

With the New Year the High Commissioner pressed harder for drastic measures:

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

January 17, 1900.— . . . If, when our troops have withdrawn, the Government remains in the old hands, the Colony will be part of the British Empire only in name.

On the other hand, if a loyal Government can be secured for only a few years the position will, I believe, be saved for ever. The Bond unsupported from outside would die a natural death in the Colony, unless it could artificially strengthen itself by the possession of power and patronage. It is only the Imperial Parliament which can deal with this situation. No local Parliament elected by the present constituencies including rebels would support a loyal Ministry.

If, on the other hand, the districts which have gone into rebellion were temporarily deprived of their constitutional rights—as far as representation was concerned—I think we should be sure of a loyal majority in the remainder of the country, which would tide us over the time of danger. . . .

I am all for a policy of conciliation when war is over, for letting bygones be bygones, for treating Dutch like British, forgetting that nine-tenths of them have been our open enemies at a most critical time. But we cannot put the loyal population, to whom the existing Constitution is already unfair, under the heel of absolute rebels, who have only just been in arms against us. There must be at least an interval during which the latter may purge their treason by a suspension of their political power.[2]

February 21.— . . . Are we not to summon Parliament to vote supplies for the next financial year, beginning 1st July? If we do not, the Constitution is already broken. But if we do, what Parliament are we to summon? The present one? Then, assuming, as no doubt we may, that the members actually in revolt will not appear, what is to be done with the members whose constituencies are in revolt? Are they to be allowed to help in voting down the loyalist minority? . . .[3]

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 31-33 (Milner to Chamberlain, December 27, 1899).

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 57-58.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 61.

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This last strenuous protest when received in March was sent round the Cabinet. The more the Colonial Secretary reflected the more he demurred. The formal memorandum framed under his instructions by his department for the Cabinet was very stiff. "It seems very desirable to avoid any tampering with the Constitution of the Colony . . . any such action would give rise to stormy debates in Parliament, and many people who are at one with the Government in the prosecution of the war to a satisfactory settlement would strongly oppose any arbitrary interference with the Constitution of a self-governing Colony. It is also by no means certain that the Colonies of Australia and the Dominion of Canada would view with satisfaction the creation of a precedent of this kind."

Would suspension be worth while for Milner's own purposes? Chamberlain thought not. "There is also some danger lest Her Majesty's Government might be unduly hampered later on in arriving at a workable settlement by the insistence upon their views of a Ministry representing the exclusively British section. . . . Mr. Chamberlain has already informed Sir A. Milner that the decisions of Her Majesty's Government are not likely to be affected either by any agitation by the Bond or by any counter agitation."[1]

And the Colonial Secretary minuted more privately for his department: "As at present advised, the drastic views of Sir A. Milner seem to me impolitic and unnecessary" (March 5, 1900). His judgment was wise. This statesman is anything but the trampling jingo of the travesties at home and abroad.

III

Presidents Kruger and Steyn made "in the sight of the Triune God" their appeal for peace on impossible terms. Not only did they demand the recognition of both Republics as "Sovereign International States", but also that "those of Her Majesty's subjects who have taken part with us in the war shall suffer no harm whatever in person or property". Lord Salisbury replied: "Her Majesty's Government can only answer Your Honours' telegram by saying that they are not prepared to assent to the

[1] Memorandum for the Cabinet, Colonial Office, March 7, 1900.

independence either of the South African Republic or of the Orange Free State."[1]

For some time Milner's letters are in a less sombre mood. Heartened by our marches towards Bloemfontein and Pretoria, he depicts brilliantly the confused life about him. He sticks to it that the Imperial Parliament will find it absolutely necessary to deal with Cape Colony by exceptional legislation. But the Colonial Secretary stuck to it in his turn that coercion never could change the Dutch but conciliation might.

The High Commissioner's difficulties were eased for a time. The Colony had been cleared of the invaders, the embers of the first rebellion were put out, or almost ceased to glow; a general rising amongst the Dutch population was no longer feared. Towards mid-June, after the British occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria, the Bond Ministry collapsed at Cape Town, owing to its internal dissensions on the treatment of rebels and the annexation of the Republics. Sir Gordon Sprigg formed a British Ministry with the support of Schreiner and Solomon, and the question of suspending the Constitution fell into abeyance. Chamberlain held that his more restrained policy in the last few months had made Schreiner's attitude possible; but that Milner's more drastic policy, had it been sanctioned, would have united the Dutch to a man and bitterly exasperated the whole racial problem.

In a temperate dispatch he had explained at length his policy upon the racial dispute embittered by rebellion. A short message shows how he held the scales even:

> Clemency to rebels is a policy which has the hearty sympathy of Her Majesty's Government, but justice to loyalists is an obligation of duty and honour. The question is how can these two policies be harmonised. It is clear that in the interest of future peace it is necessary to show that rebellion cannot be indulged in with impunity, and above all that, if unsuccessful, it is not a profitable business for the rebel. Otherwise the State would be offering a premium to rebellion.[2]

Milner next asked the Colonial Secretary whether the disfranchisement of rebels was to be for life or for a given period.

[1] March 11, 1900. Cd. 261, 1900, pp. 20-22.

[2] Cd. 264, 1900, p. 7 (Chamberlain to Milner, Telegram, May 5, 1900).

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The reply telegraphed on June 10 was that "Disfranchisement for life did not seem to Her Majesty's Government to be a very serious punishment for rebellion".[1]

Upon this rock the Schreiner Cabinet broke. But the disfranchisement proposed by the Treason Bill of Sir Gordon Sprigg's Ministry was not for life, but for five years. With little demur Chamberlain consented to this rare leniency. After that the Cape Parliament was prorogued, and, as we shall see, did not meet again for nearly two years. Between the Colonial Minister and the High Commissioner working harmony was restored. Milner, engrossed by his own endless cares, nowhere shows at this time—he made amends later—any appreciation of the fact that his position would have been impossible but for the Colonial Minister's support. Who held the command of public opinion at home and in the Empire during the last year of the nineteenth century Chamberlain would soon show. But we see the influence of the Cape Constitution dispute in some of the discourse between the pro-consul and his own devoted friends:

Sir A. Milner to Mr. Rendel.—May 30, 1900.— . . . The fact is the *Under Secretaries* have largely saved me. Chamberlain, I believe, has stuck to me right through, but *till I succeeded*, I don't believe there was another Minister who wouldn't have chucked me (I don't say they would have been to blame for I did give them a lot to swallow). But *Selborne*, and *Brodrick* certainly and I think also Wyndham, have been "bricks" of the first order right away through. . . . *I have saved* the British position in South Africa. . . .

Mr. Rendel to Sir A. Milner.—June 23.— . . . I am sure there is a great deal of truth in what you say about the Under-Secretaries. They have acted, all three, like trumps, throughout. . . . But great honour is due to Chamberlain. He has upheld you with a courage and tenacity very rare in public life.[2]

Milner too in his different way was "thinking of the future". He also, when the British army crossed the Vaal, expected an early termination of the war, and concentrated more intensely upon his plans for reconstruction. He saw that for success in that task he would have to shift the base of his administration

[1] Cd. 264, 1900, p. 34. [2] *Milner Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 103-104.

to the Transvaal itself, while remaining High Commissioner. Unless these conditions were approved by the Home Government, he would not care to remain in South Africa. He would rather wind up as soon as might be and come away. "I am, as I think you know, not desirous of remaining very long in the public service, and am not a candidate for any other post." [1] Further, he was constrained to raise a personal question. The expenses of his position since he landed in Cape Town three years before had been a drain on his private resources.

This touched Chamberlain to the quick. Though he did not mention it, he had severe reasons of his own to make him sympathise. His staunch kindness in reply was worthy of them both: "... I agree to your conditions and hope to make arrangements which will be satisfactory to you. Curiously enough I had a letter on the stocks on this subject, for although you never said a word to me in reference to it, in any of your letters, I have had a suspicion that you might be making greater sacrifices than in my opinion would be justifiable. I do not think that anyone who serves his country with such ability and devotion as you have done ought to suffer in purse for his patriotism. . . ." [2] In the future Milner for his combined posts was to receive £11,000 a year.

To Milner's stipulation for a greater High Commissionership with its seat in the Transvaal the Colonial Minister further agrees, and desires it no less.

IV

As the summer wears on Milner doubts whether the new British administration at the Cape can hold and legislate; whether Schreiner may not go against it after all; whether suspension or at least some overriding of the Constitution may not become inevitable. The Colonial Secretary answers gently, but is not to be moved. Again he thought his own view vindicated when in August the Treason Bill was carried in the Cape Assembly by a small majority. More than ever, as the last letter of this sequence declares with energetic emphasis, Chamberlain is

[1] *Milner Papers*, pp. 145-146 (Milner to Chamberlain, May 30, 1900).

[2] Chamberlain to Milner, June 18, 1900).

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resolved that the Imperial Parliament shall not meddle with the Cape Constitution:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

July 23.—You and I are in the same boat as regards the strain which these troublous times impose upon us. I have had no regular holiday or set-up for three years, and I see no chance of getting one this autumn. Still I keep well and hope to see the business through. . . .

As regards the Cape I think that affairs have gone on as well as we could possibly expect under the circumstances. . . . In any case we should have to point to an absolute deadlock before we could successfully attempt an alteration or suspension of the existing Constitution. . . .

September 10.— . . . Are you not a little too pessimistic with regard to the condition of affairs at the Cape? Of course we have always taken into account the character of Colonial politics. We know how thoroughly disloyal many of the Afrikanders are, and how weak and unreasonable are many of our own friends. . . . But, after all, nothing can alter the permanent facts of the situation which dominate the politics of the Colony, namely, the existence of a Dutch majority largely consisting of persons disloyal to our rule. We have to lie on the bed which our predecessors made for us. The more I think of it the more I doubt whether the present or any House of Commons would ever consent to take away a Colonial Constitution once given without at least the absolute proof of a widespread and dangerous conspiracy. . . . And as we should be opposed by many if not all of the Progressives as well as the Bond, and should have against us the general feeling of every self-governing colony, I can hardly conceive the possibility of carrying such a measure in face of such opposition. Therefore, we have to get on as best we can and I can only congratulate you on the way in which you have hitherto managed this most difficult situation. . . .

No hope if he remained Colonial Secretary that he would remove from this position. If he did not remain Colonial Secretary, Milner assuredly would cease to be High Commissioner in South Africa. For the Unionist Government itself would be out of power.

But Chamberlain meant to settle that matter. He had no intention of leaving anything to chance. After five renowned years he was determined to secure a renewed mandate from the

constituencies at the most propitious hour, instead of tarrying through twelve months up to a more doubtful season. At sixty-four, instead of losing his audacity, he doubled it and was to be decided to the end of his career by that unquenchable spirit. He intended to do a thing that no statesman, neither Disraeli nor Gladstone, had achieved in the generation under household franchise.

The British democratic systems are like each other and unlike the United States in one characteristic. Their legislatures do not sit for fixed periods, but are irregularly subject to dissolution in a crisis. Uncertainty from whatever cause arising, about the date of an appeal to the polls; the desire or fear of an exceptional dissolution—these influences deeply disturb from time to time the working of Cabinets, of the House of Commons, and of the parties. When Oppositions believe with abnormal fervour that Government should revert to their hands, and when they count eagerly upon success at the polls, they challenge the Government to go to the country or may even seek to force that resort. Contrarily, when Oppositions stand to lose by dissolution before a Parliament has reached its last gasp, they denounce an accelerated appeal to the people as a nefarious manœuvre grossly violating both the correct practice and the mellow amenities of our hallowed constitution.

When Lord Roberts turned the tide of fortune, and peace within a few months was vividly expected, an instinct that members would soon have to reckon with their constituencies spread of itself in the lobbies. By the middle of March for instance, at the Nottingham meeting of the National Liberal Federation, the contingency of an early General Election was in public and private the topic most eagerly discussed next to the need for more love within the party or at least more cohesion. "Both Sir Edward Grey and Herbert Gladstone discussed it amid breathless attention in a crowded hall." [1] Both protested against this rumour that when the Republics were occupied and annexed, Parliament would be dissolved, instead of scuffling and shuffling in an ordinary way through one more session.

But the feeling of approaching decease entered the air at

[1] Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament*, 1895–1900, p. 348 (March 16, 1900).

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Westminster. Lassitude fell upon the House of Commons. Presently came the beggarly array of empty benches. The House was often counted out at an early hour. Members had no appetite for their work, though it was light fare. Their hearts were partly at the front and partly in their constituencies. Ministers were little seen on the Treasury Benches. By the first weeks of summer this Parliament of itself was moribund.

V

On May Day the main British army began its march from Bloemfontein to Pretoria. Final victory and a good peace could not be far?

Chamberlain amongst his own people sounded his note. Since the outbreak of the war, seven months before, he had not addressed any political meeting in his city. Now he presided on the evening of May 11 over a gathering of the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association. We can well understand that with the beating pulse of war-time his townsfolk, exulting in him as never yet, burned to hear what he had to say and exceeded their usual mighty welcome. There was an enormous demand for tickets. The Town Hall was packed, but could have been filled many times over. The masses gathered round were estimated to number sixty thousand. While he spoke their shouting was heard within, and when the meeting was over they gave him a thunderous greeting without.

His speech, though not amongst his finer speeches in form, was not unworthy of this enthusiasm. "On these occasions I speak to the friends of a lifetime who have never failed me in good report or evil report." He allowed himself and them party-flings enough like every other statesman who addressed party-meetings. He likened Lord Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists to "foolish virgins who trim their Unionist lamps fourteen years too late". We must still recollect that the Liberal Imperialists nearly all managed to support Milner while repudiating Chamberlain. Liberals of the anti-war school, he maintained, had encouraged President Kruger to believe "that whenever he got into trouble with Her Majesty's Government he could always rely on Her Majesty's Opposition". He uttered one prediction,

always in his mind at this time, verified in the world-conflict which he would not live to see:

We are conducting what I have called a great war under absolutely novel conditions. It has fallen to our lot to make the first experiment in actual warfare with an enemy armed with Mauser rifles, with smokeless powder, with the most powerful modern artillery. We have had to meet a foe as brave as ourselves and skilful in a particular form of defensive warfare of which no experience on a large scale had hitherto been had by any military power. . . . But do not think that Englishmen alone make mistakes, and do not be afraid that if even greater trials should befall us we shall not be able to hold our own against any who may come against us. . . . I say that we shall emerge from this war stronger than we have ever been before. We shall have tested our weak points, we shall find out our defects; I hope we shall have the wisdom and the courage to correct them. And, above all, we have realised the greatness, the possibilities, the unity of this great federation of sister-nations that we call the British Empire.

He had avowed his belief that Lord Roberts had brought the war "almost within measurable distance of a satisfactory conclusion". What then? He announced on behalf of the Government that both the Boer Republics "must be and shall be fully incorporated in Her Majesty's Dominions".

That is not a bad fate for them. They will not be worse off than the people of Canada or the people of Australia. . . . As soon as it is safe and possible it will be the desire and the intention of Her Majesty's Government to introduce these States into the great circle of self-governing Colonies. . . . There is only one cure for racial antagonism and that is a reign of justice and equality. . . . I am certain it is the one desire of this country that the two races should as soon as possible forget the past, that they should work together for the prosperity of the common country in which they must live together. . . .

But he commented in a very different tone upon the activities of the Stop-the-War Committee. "Up to the present time their efforts have been powerless against the patriotism of the people. But they are waiting, they tell us, for the reaction. May they wait long!" Were the sacrifices of the war to be

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"thrown away in an incomplete and unsatisfactory settlement?" "It is our duty to prevent it."

His closing sentence gave the electoral hint. "That is our policy, and if it be challenged we are ready to appeal to the country to give us that support, in carrying it into effective operation, which will alone enable us to maintain our paramount position in South Africa—a position which the indifference and apathy of past years have so seriously endangered and threatened." [1]

VI

The British Army marched into Johannesburg at the end of May—it seemed like a miracle to some witnesses who remembered how Tom Dodd, since dead, and others, had dared to frame and transmit to the Colonial Secretary the Uitlanders' petition to the Queen. Early in June the Union Jack was hoisted at Pretoria. Chamberlain and all about him were not only sincere but exhilarated in their belief that "the end of the war is really in sight".

Already familiar to his colleagues in the Cabinet was his view that the fall of Pretoria should be followed speedily by a General Election to ensure Unionist control of the settlement and to convince the Boers that this time they could not count upon a change of Government in Britain to reward prolonged resistance. Chamberlain pointed to the by-elections. Captain "Jack" Seeley had been returned for the Isle of Wight by a largely increased Unionist majority. In South Manchester two days after, the Ministerial majority had increased from 78 in 1895, when Unionist fortunes were at the flood, to 2039![2] After this, just before the Whitsuntide recess, Unionist members

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, May 11, 1900.

[2] Isle of Wight

July 1895	
Unionist	5809
Liberal	5363
Majority	446
May 23, 1900	
Unionist	6432
Liberal	5370
Majority	1062

Manchester South

July 1895	
Unionist	4457
Liberal	4379
Majority	78
May 25, 1900	
Unionist	5497
Liberal	3458
Majority	2039

plied the Whips with enquiries. The Whips hitherto had thrown cold water on eagerness. They now admitted that a General Election in July was possible.

We have no formal note of Lord Salisbury's opinions. We may assume with fair certainty that he was even more loath than usual to move at the Colonial Secretary's pace. As on some other occasions, he came round with reluctance to the opinion that it was expedient and necessary to do what he disliked.

On which side of the constitutional issue was the balance of argument? Was it "cricket", asked some good Conservatives in common with all Liberals, to use for the profit of the party in office the general sacrifice and achievement of the nation and the Empire? Would not the country be repelled by that tactic? It would be called an infamous trick by all the Opposition sections infuriated into an electioneering unity. Thus much for one case.

What of the other side? Chamberlain could reply that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's following at home and Hofmeyr's at the Cape counted upon using party to the utmost in British politics—against the Government in general, against the Colonial Secretary in particular. The Boers in arms were holding on in the hope that in another twelve months or so the present policy of the Unionists would be reversed by the Liberals. British efforts and sacrifices would be frustrated by the usual British oscillation at the polls. Of all ideas this was the most abhorrent to Chamberlain's conviction as a statesman as well as to his fighting temperament.

As usual his definiteness soon began to prevail in the Cabinet as a body, against the inclination of the Prime Minister and some other Ministers. He at first desired a General Election in June immediately after the occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria. To this political form of "sweeping strategy" he could not bring his colleagues. Then for a brief while he hoped for an appeal to the country in July. By now the majority of Unionists in the House of Commons were warmly of the same mind.

VII

But strange events in the Far East helped to postpone a General Election in the United Kingdom. China for a few months

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superseded South Africa in the world's attention. That empire was convulsed by an anti-foreign explosion. Of the patriotic societies one took for its ideal the "Fist of Righteous Harmony" and from this all the insurgents came to be called "Boxers". Encouraged by the Empress Dowager, the movement waxed murderous. In Peking the Chancellor of the Japanese Legation and the German Minister were killed. The foreign legations were besieged and in jeopardy for weeks; they could not send out either word or sign. At length the ghastly rumour that they had been massacred was almost universally believed. Meanwhile Admiral Sir Edward Seymour's relieving force hastily composed of mixed nationalities had been driven back.

At this same time Chamberlain was anxiously concerned with the fierce little war in Ashanti. The Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir F. Hodgson, and a British garrison were besieged in Kumassi, and there were daily fears for their safety until they cut their way out.

CHAMBERLAIN TO HIS WIFE

June 19, 1900.— . . . The news from China is very bad of course; we hear of a massacre at the Legations. I see that the United States Government has been forced to join in spite of Washington's last message. There is no news from Ashanti, except a report that Hodgson was going to try and break out from the fort. I suppose in the ordinary course we shall be up early in August if there is no dissolution. My colleagues in the House of Commons are all in favour of July, but I expect it will not come off. I hope the garden is looking well and that you sit out a great deal. . . .

June 22.— . . . The Fishmongers [Company] have decided after all to give me my box early, and July 31st has been fixed for the ceremony, but I wonder whether I shall be electioneering then! . . .

June 28.— . . . The news from China is a little better and Seymour is relieved.[1] If only I could hear that the Legations were safe, and Hodgson relieved at Kumassi I should be happy. . . .

July 2.— . . . [Dinner at Marlborough House] . . . The Prince was very gracious. Lord Salisbury as usual came in the wrong uniform, levée

[1] Admiral Seymour, checked when half-way to Peking, had received from the coast reinforcements enabling him to make good his retreat to Tientsin.

instead of State! I asked him if he had a dispensation. "No", he said, "I forgot; I always do. . . ." After dinner, at the Prince's request, I had a long talk with the Khedive and was agreeably disappointed. It appears that he wants to be taken as *un homme sérieux* and is much offended because some people will talk frivol to him. He was simple and earnest. . . . The Duke of York told me this afternoon that my last letter to him was unsigned. I have never done such a thing in my life before, and I have asked H.R.H. to send me the letter. . . .

July 5.— . . . I have good news of Kumassi. The Governor and the majority of the force have broken out and are safe; a small garrison has been left and the Commander of the Forces promises to relieve them shortly. . . .[1] Meanwhile the news from China is as bad as it can be. I fear there is no doubt that all the Europeans have been massacred. . . . As to the General Election the feeling here is *very* strong in favour of July but I greatly fear that China will prevent. It is a cross-issue of the most serious kind and may interfere with the prospect of securing a verdict on the war and its consequences.

July 24.—The debate is over and I have got my vote with a majority of 156 or thereabouts. . . . I only wish the dissolution were to-morrow. . . .

This was his sigh for a vanished hope. The besieged Legations in Peking were not delivered until the middle of August and dissolution had to be put off to early autumn. October was the likely month. Since the struggle at the polls could not take place before the summer holidays, it must be after. This was settled by the Cabinet in the third week of July. For divergent reasons the Prime Minister and the Colonial Minister were equally unpleased. Very fully he confessed his motives and anxieties in a long letter to the High Commissioner.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MILNER

July 23, 1900.—*J. C. to M.*— . . . I think, between ourselves, that a General Election here is quite likely in the early Autumn. I wish it could have been taken a month ago. I do not feel inclined to undertake the responsibility of a settlement, which must raise an immense number of difficult questions, without a popular mandate which will strengthen

[1] The devoted little force of 3 white men and 100 Haussas left behind in Kumassi fort with three weeks' rations were brilliantly relieved by the soldier afterwards known as Sir James Willcocks.

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the hands of the Government. If we get this and the Bond try us too hardly we may perhaps find it possible to deal with them in a way which certainly could not be attempted in existing circumstances.

The crisis in China, and the possibilities of further trouble in Ashanti and elsewhere in West Africa, complicate the situation, and make possible the realisation of what has always been my greatest fear, that public attention should be diverted from what is really the main and simple issue of the South African War and the settlement which is to follow it. On the latter point, we can I believe rely upon success, but I dread the opening up of minor issues and the confusion which might follow. . . .

August 22.—*M. to J. C.*— . . . I was exceedingly grateful for the information you gave me in your letter of July 23. . . . I sincerely hope that a General Election may not be far distant. If it were to result, as I believe it must, in a public vote of confidence in your South African policy, it would do more than anything else to clear the air here and lighten the task of reconstruction. Indeed, I feel the job before us is such a heavy one that without the assured support of the British people nobody can carry it to a successful issue. I should be sorry to have to begin with the possibility of any "wobble" at home hanging over my head.

We see how far from being uppermost in either mind was the party motive and how strong was Chamberlain's case for an early dissolution.

VIII

Shortly before the end of the session the House flared up in debate on penalties for the Cape rebels. Once more the Opposition, except Sir Edward Grey, imputed an infinite variety of reasons for disapproval and distrust of the Colonial Secretary. His reply was brisk enough to keep the Unionist benches cheering, but he repeated in vain to the other side his desire and intention to give to the Boer States "at the earliest possible moment self-government similar to that enjoyed by our own Colonies".

It was in every mind that this Parliament would not reassemble, and that an appeal to the country would be made. The Colonial Secretary stated indirectly why he felt this course to be unavoidable. He held that the methods of the Opposition

as a whole were lengthening the war by encouraging though deluding the Boers.

In sitting down I can only say that, although I recognise the enormous difficulty of the task which has been imposed on us, I am hopeful, I am sanguine, that we shall bring it to a successful conclusion if we have the clear, the undoubted support of the nation behind us. If we could have had the warm authoritative support of the Opposition in this House, that is what I would have been best pleased to have had; if we could have shown that there was absolutely no party in this country on the question, I firmly believe, as I am standing here, that the war would have been brought to a conclusion before now. I believe, and I have some evidence to justify it, that the hope of reaction has prolonged the war, just as in the earlier stages of the war the Boers were encouraged to greater efforts by the hope of intervention.[1]

The division was one of the occasions when the inner state of a torn party is exhibited in the lobbies. The amendment to reduce Colonial Office supply was rejected by 208 to 52. The Opposition openly displayed hopeless discords. This exposure of Liberal dissensions damaged all the sections. About forty members went with the Government; the uncompromising anti-war vote numbered only fifty odd, though including the Irish Nationalists; Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his intermediates, about thirty-five in number, evaded the question and walked out.

Any virtue whatever in the Colonial Secretary was what the Opposition in ordinary would not and could not recognise. When they praised his abilities it was at the expense of his character. The "Balliol set" of the Liberal Imperialists, Asquith, Grey and Haldane, were devoted to Milner, but not to the Colonial Secretary, who did not derive from either University.[2] Lord Rosebery supported the war, but not Chamberlain, who for his part had not one atom of belief in the fibre of the leader of Liberal Imperialism. Few honest men can be found to swear that they love those who love not them. Chamberlain understood the "pro-Boers" whom he denounced; but he scorned, and far too much,

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxvi. col. 1199 (House of Commons, July 25, 1900).

[2] J. A. Spender, *Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, vol. i. p. 302.

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the Liberal Imperialists. His conviction regarding the Liberal party as a whole was that whatever he did they would stick at nothing; that in the future as since 1886 they would leave him no option but to battle them down. His task demanded a new mandate from the country. As he saw it no sane statesman in his position could go into another session with a General Election in front of him instead of behind him.

His correspondence gives some quick impressions of the last days of a session and a parliament:

TO HIS WIFE

July 27.— . . . A Cabinet Council of more than two hours, interviews, boxes as usual, and a speech which under these circumstances weighs on my spirits. I was unable to lunch until three, and then only in a hurry, so that I am not altogether in the most amiable frame of mind. . . .

July 31.— . . . What a day for news! The capture of Prinsloo's force[1] is most important. Then the telegram from Sir C. Macdonald, saying that the Legations were alive on the 21st, and lastly the terribly tragedy of the King of Italy's murder. To-day we have the Duke of Edinburgh's death. . . .

August 3.— . . . I feared I might be engaged all day with a report of my Colonial Vote, but the "unspeakable Opposition", after asking specially that a day should be given, completely ignored it. . . . I think they have had enough of me for this session. . . . We have had what I hope is our last Cabinet to-day, and I think we can look back on the session with satisfaction. . . .

August 6.— . . . An exciting interview with Major Morris, who brought Hodgson out of Kumassi. It is extraordinary that they ever got away alive. . . . I must get the Governor transferred as soon as possible as I do not think he has been wise. . . .

August 7.— . . . We got away last night a little after one, and this evening we are hoping for an early rising. . . . Thank goodness! the session is over, but it has been a good one for us, although very anxious and trying at times. . . . I have no news, but the war in South Africa seems to be dribbling out. I hope the advance on Peking has begun.

[1] 4000 men, the largest capture since Cronje's surrender. But De Wet escaped.

Next day the newspaper reviews of the session showed that, whoever liked it or not, his ascendancy in the House of Commons was higher than ever before. While the Opposition had no principle of cohesion but comprehensive antipathy to him, he was regarded by a solid majority of citizens as the only statesman who knew the country's mind and his own. In the first days of the session which had opened so gloomily and dangerously his great speech on the vote of censure had broken the hopes of the Opposition. Since then, by contrast with the diminished popularity of his colleagues, he had been the mainstay of the Unionist Government.

IX

Though no formal announcement had yet been made everyone knew that this Parliament was dead. At its last sitting, on August 8, a storm of personal abuse fell on his head and gave some hint that the coming struggle would be fought with savage fury. This was because Chamberlain meant to publish certain correspondence found by Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein.

As we know from references in former chapters of this volume the dossier not only contained communications which had passed between Afrikander leaders in Cape Town and the two ex-Presidents, but included letters from some Radical members of the House of Commons. Mr. John Ellis, M.P., was a sincere and high-minded person, but as an ardent sympathiser with the enemy he had written recently to an Afrikander correspondent: "We want a stream of *facts*"—a celebrated phrase in the records of propaganda.[1] What may differ more from the whole truth than a selection of facts? What Chamberlain relished most were the letters of an old henchman turned Thersites. Labouchere—as we know but may recall—wrote to the agent of the Transvaal and distilled into one sentence the gall of years: "Don't for goodness sake let Mr. Kruger make his first mistake by refusing this; a little skilful management and he will give Master Joe another fall".[2] No word against Chamberlain ever did him so much good.

[1] Cd. 369, 1900, p. 12.

[2] To Mr. Reitz from Mr. Montagu White reporting a conversation the same day with Labouchere, August 4, 1899. *Ibid.* p. 16.

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These documents were published on August 23. It was a battering blow to the Liberal left. Twofold was the effect on the majority of the nation. The private indictments of Krugerism by Afrikander leaders at the Cape seemed a vivid revelation of the justice of the British cause. And it seemed as clear that the malice of the Colonial Secretary's personal enemies knew no scruple. If the exposure caused Unionists throughout the country to shake hands with each other and laugh with confidence, hatred on the other side conspired to bring personal defamation to a climax, and we are bound to understand the state of party-passions. Chamberlain proposed to crush at the polls the anti-war party, who believed with white heat that British policy was bad and stupid. And he proposed to keep the whole Opposition in the wilderness for yet another half-decade, having already thwarted them one way or another for over fourteen years. It was too much to be borne, and if thoughts could kill he would have been found dead before the polls.

A campaign of insinuation against his own honour and his family's in connection with War Office contracts had already been opened in a part of the Radical press, and was taken up in the House of Commons on the last day of the session. It will be better to deal with these attacks at a later point, when they came to a more odious development. On the strength of a report by the War Office Contracts Committee, Mr. Lloyd George alleged that the firm of Kynochs had been favoured by the War Office because Arthur Chamberlain, the Minister's brother, was its Chairman. "I have nothing whatever to do with his private concerns", said the Colonial Secretary, "any more than he has anything to do with my public concerns, and it is a gross abuse" —(loud cheers and Opposition cries of "Order")—"it is a gross abuse to attack a man through his relatives for whom he is not responsible." [1] This was true but it did not stay his assailants. He did not realise that the emission of poison gas was as yet only slight by comparison with what was very soon to come.

For giving to the world the captured correspondence, the Colonial Secretary was denounced as though he had violated the superscription "private and confidential" of letters addressed to

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxvii. col. 1014 (House of Commons, August 8, 1900).

himself. The leader of the Opposition called him "Paul Pry". War is not make-believe. The heads of all Intelligence Services in war-time and the Cabinet Ministers they inform might as well be called Paul Prys all. The documents had not been unearthed by espionage under the auspices of the Colonial department. They were a military seizure. They had been first received by the War Office and the Home Office. Publication, needless to say, was the decision of the Government as a whole.

X

At the end of August he sent the Prime Minister his estimate of electoral prospects and events were soon to prove it sure. Salisbury was now bound to yield to the arguments for an appeal to the nation while time was auspicious; but he had not changed his own inward aversion from the resolute policy which saved his Government from disaster or destruction at a deferred General Election.

CHAMBERLAIN TO SALISBURY

Highbury, August 31.— . . . I was very sorry to hear that you were not well. I earnestly hope the change—for there can be no rest—is doing you good. . . . I have been looking into electoral matters in this and other districts . . . and although I may be over-sanguine I continue to feel confident of a majority equal to the present if the election comes soon. . . . On the whole China seems in a less critical condition. It is curious that—as far as I can judge—this tremendous question has not yet aroused any interest in the public mind. The constituencies care as much and no more about it than they do about Ashanti. . . .[1]

On the day after this letter was written Lord Roberts proclaimed the annexation of the Transvaal. Paul Kruger, nigh his desolate seventy-fifth birthday, fled to Lourenço Marques. As soon as it could be arranged, some weeks later, he embarked on a Dutch man-of-war for Europe. He had better have accepted Chamberlain's invitation after the Raid to sail for London. His policy of racialism and armaments had been fatal to South Africa; but he had been led to catastrophe by a creed and a

[1] The Allies had just marched through the Forbidden City and occupied the Imperial Palace.

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dream, and now there was nothing ignoble in what he called his "night of affliction".[1] His exit from the Transvaal seemed to popular imagination in Britain the most signal proof that the war was as good as over.

So far Chamberlain, explain him as you may, had never come into full conflict with any antagonist whom he had not overthrown. As with Gladstone and Parnell together in 1886 and after, so now with President Kruger for all his armaments. Yet in the latter case as in the former, it is certain as we have seen, that Chamberlain would have preferred compromise proper—exacting equal concession from the other side—rather than the fight to the death. His last proposals for a peaceful settlement, though enfranchising the Uitlanders, would have left the Dutch burghers for years in control of the Volksraad, and guaranteed the Transvaal against arbitrary interference. Now, whatever else might be doubtful Boer success was impossible.

The Queen's "Proclamation for dissolving the present Parliament and declaring the calling of another" was dated from Balmoral "this seventeenth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred, and in the sixty-fourth year of our reign". So ceased to exist the last completed Parliament of the long Victorian age and of the nineteenth century.

[1] *Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, vol. ii. p. 362.

CHAPTER LXXIV

THE KHAKI ELECTION

(1900)

CHAMBERLAIN forces the Fighting—Ruthlessness and the Reasons, public and private—Continuity of South African Policy—The "Abominable Flood of Slanders"—A Whirlwind of Energy—His Meetings and Messages—"Sold to the Boers": A Garbled Telegram and the Outcry—Course of the Polling—A Second Liberal Overthrow —Unionist Majority 134—An Unprecedented Achievement—Lord Morley's Tribute: "The Genius, Fire and Popularity of Chamberlain".

I

FORMER abuse he might liken to the hot blast from the desert. Now his ordeal was an avalanche of mud. If this, then, were to be the ugliest fight of his life, he would force the fighting. There would be no quarter. Why did he feel so? We have noticed the beginnings of a new campaign of calumny. For the General Election it was now worked up. Some Radical journals implied and a host of Liberals whispered that as he had been "up to his neck" in the Raid, conspiring with capitalists and jobbers, so he and his family were making a corrupt profit out of the war. The falsity of the former charge was far exceeded by the slander of the second. We know how much of the private fortune he possessed on entering Parliament he had lost by giving himself to the public service. The imputations upon his private integrity were what he meant without mentioning them, when he spoke of the "abominable flood".

For the first time in generations a General Election in this country was to turn on the personality of a single Minister who was not Prime Minister. He never had stood on the defensive; attack was the soul of his genius as a fighter; and now with

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resistless vigour he threw amenity to the winds. It may be said that he was in a strong position and ought to have had Palmerston's humour. Palmerston never was subjected to the viler aspersions when accused in 1857 of dissolving with selfish levity more than twelve months short of a normal six years' term. There is a more curious comparison. Gladstone in 1874 appealed to the country when his Parliament had lasted five years one month and twenty-one days. The Unionists now appealed when their Parliament had lasted as long within a week—five years one month and fourteen days. We may leave the difference to the schoolmen. In any case Chamberlain would have fought, as even he never had fought, for Unionist victory and a continuous policy in South Africa. The climax of calumny gave more impetus to his energies, sharpened his steel, and made him remorseless.

II

Two things must be allowed. No man in our political history had ever received more extreme provocation; none was more unsparing in reprisals. No milder method could have succeeded against the more envenomed ingenuity of attack upon his character. Slander of him and his would have been just as virulent had the old Parliament run a full six years' term—had the dissolution, that is, been postponed for ten months. No statesman has described better, from day to day, the whirl of a General Election raging in the old style through weeks. His letters are like bulletins.

TO HIS WIFE[1]

September 19.— . . . It is only a few hours since I said good-bye but already it seems a long time. . . . I see that the baser section of the Opposition intend to continue their campaign of personal calumny and make the most of it. One has to wade through a great deal of mud on these occasions . . . it does harm to our public life. . . .

September 20.— . . . Powell-Williams . . . remains sanguine, as do I also, although when the odds are so great it is not possible to be without anxiety till the first days are over. . . . Invitations to speak are pouring

[1] Mrs. Chamberlain's father died some months before and she had just gone abroad with her mother.

in, but I cannot accept any at a distance, except Oldham, for Winston Churchill . . . My address is to be published to-morrow morning. . . .

September 21.— . . . I am in rather a nervous state. I have not made a note for my speech yet but must do so to-day. I think I shall feel better when I am in the thick of it. . . . Lord Roberts telegraphs that the war is over; he wants to come home. . . .

September 26.— . . . The pressure is tremendous. Telegrams are incessant, and the correspondence treble the ordinary. . . . Up to the present I seem to be the only Cabinet Minister fighting outside my own constituency. Balfour's two speeches seem to me weak and Salisbury's manifesto most depressing.

Yesterday I started at 2 P.M. [for Oldham] . . . on to the theatre; an immense building crowded to the roof—at least five thousand I should say. It was an easy place to speak in, except for the heat and atmosphere, which were terrific. No interruptions. You could have heard a pin drop in the argumentative part of my speech, which lasted an hour and ten minutes and satisfied *me*. I think it will do good. . . . We shall have some sharp fights in this neighbourhood [that of Birmingham] and I am not so confident as I was. . . .

September 27.— . . . Everything shows how right I was to insist on keeping the fight on South African lines. . . . I keep very well although the strain is very great. . . . All the news from South Africa is excellent but I am obliged to leave my Office [the Colonial department] to take care of itself. . . . I do not like the look of things in China . . . but nobody cares a straw about China for the next ten days. . . .

September 28.— . . . A hard day yesterday winding up with the first nervous headache I have had, probably due to the glare of the lights and the atmosphere added to the excitement, but it has all gone this morning. . . . It has been remarkable all this election that hitherto there has been no sign of violence or disorder and not a single interruption anywhere. I think this must point to a popular feeling on the side of the Government, yet there have been many Liberals at all my meetings, but they have not been distinguishable from the others.[1]

The meeting last night [at Tunstall] was held in a great corn-market fitted up for the occasion, and a very bad place it appeared for speaking. Behind the seated audience were some thousands standing, and between

[1] Before the end of the struggle he met some rougher experiences.

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them and the speakers the roof came down and broke the voice . . . at last it was clear that the majority could not hear, and at the suggestion of some of them I marched down from the platform and into a dark gallery at the side twenty feet above the audience. It was not an ideal pulpit, but after this everything went well and the audience were most attentive and enthusiastic. . . .

September 29.— . . . To-day six members for Birmingham were returned unopposed; only Stone's seat [East Birmingham] is contested and I have just come from an immense meeting in the theatre in the Division. . . . We ought to win easily. . . . It has been a perfectly lovely day, sunny and warm and yet with plenty of mild air. The garden continues to look well in spite of the falling of the leaves, which is curiously irregular this year, some trees having lost everything and others of the same kind remaining quite green. We could have sat out perfectly well all day if politics had not interfered.

When polling began in the early days of October he was only half-way through the speaking and writing and telegraphing of a fight wonderful if ruthless. As soon as the date of the election became certain, he had drawn up his plan of campaign and arranged his time-table in a few hours, and he undertook immense exertions. "He telegraphed one morning",[1] noted his political agent, Charles Vince, "that he was starting from London to Birmingham. I was to meet the train. He gave me my instructions on the platform." His plan was to make in the next three weeks twelve principal speeches, giving himself if possible a day's rest between each one. He would keep to his own territory with a single exception. "I have promised Winston Churchill to speak at Oldham: it is a long way outside my limits; but I could not say 'No' to a son of Lord Randolph, for whom I had a great regard."

III

His letters just quoted have given some flying glimpses of the struggle. A few incidents may be singled out. In his opening speech in West Birmingham (September 22) where he was to be returned unopposed, he put a question in his manner. If the case against the Government's ineptitude and his own iniquity were so

[1] September 20.

glaring, why did not the Opposition rejoice in this election which they execrated? He quoted humorously the *Manchester Guardian's* remark that it was worse than useless to deny the gravity of the differences between the "two wings" of the Liberal party. "Two wings! Why there are a dozen. I should not describe them as the wings of a bird but as the legs of a caterpillar." At Oldham (September 25) the whole town seemed to turn out under mingled influences owing to the boundless enthusiasm of his supporters and the curiosity of his opponents. The Empire Theatre, holding about 4000 persons, was packed to capacity. The streets around "were crowded hours before the time fixed for the meeting by people who had realised the hopelessness of getting inside and had to be content with a glance at Mr. Chamberlain as he drove up".[1] He moved his audience when he recalled Lord Randolph's memory and supported the son:

"His father was a great friend of mine. We quarrelled sometimes—the best of friends quarrel occasionally, but we always made it up very quickly. . . . I think his son has inherited some of the great qualities of his father, his originality and his courage." If the Opposition succeeded at the polls, "pro-Boers" would hold the real power not the Liberal Imperialists.

At Tunstall (September 27), where, as we saw, was some disturbance owing to the difficulty of hearing him in an awkward building, he had to leave the platform and deliver the remainder of his speech from "a dark gallery twenty feet above the audience". One of his closing sentences from this odd tribune must be noted here because it led a few days later to the loudest shriek of the electioneering din. "The electors should not fail to heed what was said by the Mayor of Mafeking, who, speaking the other day, said that every seat lost by the Government was a seat gained to the Boers."

In East Birmingham (September 29) he defended himself from the charge—we shall return to it presently—of having forgotten or betrayed social reform in these later years. He retorted to Harcourt: "We have not done with old-age pensions. I am not dead yet. . . . It was not a practical question until we took it up here in Birmingham and took it up in a practical

[1] *The Times*, September 26, 1900.

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spirit." At Leamington (October 2) he hammered home his strongest point, privately approved by the anti-war Radicals—that it was wrong and ignominious for anyone to denounce in effect the wickedness of the war and yet vote supplies for its prosecution. And so forth to crammed meetings with dense crowds outside, at Warwick, Burton, Rugby, Cannock Chase.

On October 9 he wound up at Stourbridge, and could still find a jest and vary the appeal. The local Liberal candidate, who said he meant to follow his leaders, "would have to divide himself into half a dozen fractions before he could follow them all". Defending Lord Salisbury's foreign policy, he said, "My own views on that subject are very simple and can be expressed in a single sentence. I desire to remain on good terms and to entertain friendly relations with every great country in Europe; and I desire if possible to be something more than friends with the United States of America." He closed that speech and his campaign with these words:

> I urge the electors not to think of persons or parties but only of Imperial interests; to allow the party which has initiated the Imperial policy to carry it through, and not the party which has been hostile to that policy; which is divided against itself over important national questions; and only agrees in the desire to defeat the Government and disgrace the Colonial Secretary.

He was waved on in the thick of it when Lord James wrote from Balmoral: "I must send you a word of sincere congratulations upon the enormous energy you are displaying in this great struggle. We ought all to be very grateful to you. You will easily understand that there are matters about which one cannot write, but I am sure it would gratify you if you could hear how much your speeches are appreciated here, and I will tell you more when we meet."[1]

IV

In full truth it was a one-man election. Whether he was praised or criticised, his name was heard on every platform, filled the newspapers on both sides, and was the theme of ceaseless discussion in private. "I reckon", said a sturdy old farmer

[1] Lord James of Hereford to Chamberlain, September 29, 1900.

to an eminent man of letters, "that what we've got to settle is just this—whether we shall keep that 'ere Chamberlain in or chuck him out." To pursue him with rancour, to rake up all old calumnies and impute new, was the method of Liberals who reprobated his retorts. On the Unionist side he completely overshadowed his colleagues. Not one of them had shown any ringing power of democratic appeal. Lord Salisbury's manifesto was an anxious document beseeching good citizens not to abstain from the polls. Arthur Balfour's speeches were not trumpet calls.

In a manner for which there is no parallel in our political history, Chamberlain, neither Prime Minister nor leader of the House of Commons, was for all fighting purposes in the constituencies the real leader, and the only leader, of the Unionist masses. He not merely spoke with more energy and effect than all his colleagues put together. No one questioned that he was the man of the administration. "Mr. Chamberlain has his faults"; said *The Times*, "he has made his mistakes, but the people of the British Empire will never forget the courage, the vigour and the resolution that he has displayed at more than one critical juncture in our history."[1] Unionist candidates looked to him as to a Commander-in-Chief in this struggle. They entreated special messages. His telegrams and pithy letters were read and displayed in every constituency. His word to the nation at large on the eve of the polls was stirring enough: "Patriotism before politics. May the union between the Colonies and the Motherland, now cemented by their blood, be for ever maintained."

Far more popular with the candidates as well as the rank and file was another watchword sent about the same time to Greenock, but reproduced in most constituencies: "Every vote given against the Government is a vote given to the Boers". We shall see how this signal became momentarily distorted. His chief aim and he avowed it, was to break the Liberal Imperialists, who in practice, he reiterated, sought to divide the effective Imperialist vote, and were the chief danger to the British cause.

In the midst of the fight Chamberlain in action was described by an American and by an Australian journalist. The American wrote of his "all-conquering personality" and of "the force and subtlety, the command, the finesse and the resources

[1] September 29, 1900.

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by which he keeps rising and gaining in power". The other impressionist, a hostile witness, believed himself to have heard many more eloquent orators in Australia than this statesman, but felt just the same sense of argumentative efficiency, indomitable fighting-power, and born leadership.

V

A Unionist critic, who was no friend, described these speeches as a series marked by "relentless trenchancy". They drove Liberalism by degrees to a more desperate personal antagonism when the signs in the constituencies pointed to his unbearable triumph. These speeches, however effective for their purpose of destroying Opposition hopes for more years to come—this after all was his real unforgivable sin in their eyes—were on the whole sheer sledge-hammer work. They were both less brilliant and less corrosive than his typical satires on the platform before he became Colonial Secretary. Why then did the rage of Liberal execration come now to a pitch? His messages to the constituencies in response to the appeals of Unionist candidates were the chief cause and above all one message. What is the truth about it?

Importuned to help in the Heywood division of Lancashire the candidature of Mr. Kemp—who was himself serving at the front—Chamberlain repeated the phrase flung out about a fortnight before by the Mayor of Mafeking: "A seat lost by the Government is a seat gained to the Boers". By an extraordinary error in transmission on the part of a hurried clerk this telegram came to the *Bury Guardian* in a coarser form: "A seat lost to the Government is a seat sold to the Boers". The Post Office subsequently apologised for one of the most unlucky mistakes ever made by one of its ordinary servants in connection with a public crisis. It was proved that the telegram as sent from Highbury contained the words "gained to" not "sold to". But the explanation did little to allay the storms of protest by all the Opposition sections—Liberal Imperialists, intermediates and extreme anti-war men. It is easy to say that he would have done better as already at Tunstall to name the Mayor of Mafeking as the father of the phrase. But who could expect him to be faultless in a

contest like this? He was spurring and smiting from morning till night. The signals to candidates and constituencies had to be dictated on the instant. "I am bothered out of my life to send encouraging telegrams all over the country. They seem to write to me about everything. I cannot make out that other people are pestered in the same way" (October 1).

Again his reprisals, however hard, were nothing to the provocation. He made no such imputations upon his opponents as most of them levelled at him.

Here it is an unpleasant duty to show more particularly how his private character was assailed by part of the Radical press. He had been attacked through his brother, the head of Kynochs. He was now attacked through the rest of his family and relations. The registers at Somerset House were searched to find out what were the investments of his wife, his sons, his daughters, his brothers, his brothers-in-law, his sisters, cousins, nieces. Most of them had been connected with Birmingham industries all their lives. Only the ecstasy of partisan suspicion could suppose that the Transvaal negotiations conducted from beginning to end in concert with the Cabinet as a whole ever were or could have been influenced in the faintest by visions of war contracts in the Midlands. It might as sanely be suggested that the Colonial Secretary first went to Birmingham in 1854 during the Crimean War with a telescopic view to the business possibilities of another war at the end of the century.

We shall have to return at another point, and for the last time, to this disagreeable topic. The unsavoury system of defamation not sparing his nearest and dearest, seeking to involve all his kin, made this election a nauseating experience for him. But he refused to be entangled or to swerve an inch. He hardened his heart, bided his time, and kept his fighting grip. In public his composure was unmoved. He conceived, and might well, that it was political life and death for him to obtain a new vote of confidence from the country, to see the war to a finish, to shape the settlement.

VI

His rapid letters day by day when the polling began and the returns streamed in show the throbs of the conflict, the energy

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of his exertions, the temperamental play never disclosed by his speeches, and, despite some incidental disappointments, his growing assurance of victory.

TO HIS WIFE

October 2.— . . . The first day's elections are satisfactory but not convincing. . . . It must be remembered that we have very much more to lose than our opponents as we came in last time on the top of the tide. . . . While I am writing good news comes. It was at first reported, then denied, that Winston Churchill had got in at Oldham; now the first report is confirmed and we have gained a seat there. . . . I am very glad Churchill is in as I went down to support him and I like to see some result from my labours. . . .[1]

October 3.— . . . I am resting to-day with a bad headache, which will be gone I hope by about dinner-time . . . the natural consequence of my two meetings yesterday. The first at Leamington was very good and I never spoke better. At Warwick there were about a dozen disturbers. . . . We had stones thrown, the first thing of this kind in this election. . . . There are a number of near contests—I fear we shall lose on balance. Well I have done my best and no one can do more. . . .

October 5.—At last! The elections yesterday were splendid, and justified all my previsions. . . . Last night the returns came in with Unionist gains one after the other . . . in almost every case a great increase in Unionist majorities and a decrease for the Home Rulers. It is a mighty smash, and, if the counties do as well, we shall return with a bigger majority than in 1895. . . .

October 7.— . . . Last night [at Rugby] a crowded meeting in a long low room, heat about 120° and atmosphere that of the pit! . . . That makes five-sixths of my task accomplished. . . . I have been out of doors a great part of the day. The changes in the new garden are nearly finished and are a great improvement. We have done a great deal of lopping in the trees in the park and have a lot of planting still to finish. The herbaceous border is still very gay though everything is of course autumnal. . . .

[1] The young M.P. wrote on the same day: "My dear Chamberlain, I do not think that the victory to which I owe my seat in parliament could have been won without your help [his majority was 222 and one of the Liberal candidates was just above him in this two-seat constituency]; and I hope you will believe that I am very grateful to you for your kindness".

October 8.— . . . To-morrow is my last speech, thank goodness! I have had quite enough. . . . I am overdone with letters and telegrams asking for "words of encouragement", etc. etc. They take up ever so much time and I do not believe in them one bit. . . .

October 9.— . . . We do not seem however to be gaining in the counties, where personalities tell more than in the great towns. To-day is absolutely perfect. The ampilopsis is a wonderful sight. It is very warm with a beautiful breeze from the west. I hope it may continue for a day or two. . . .

October 10.— . . . Well, at last it is all over as far as I am concerned. I made my concluding speech . . . at Stourbridge last night. It was really a magnificent meeting, perfectly orderly and most enthusiastic, and I think I gave them a good entertainment. . . .

There have been hardly any changes yet on balance in the Counties, and I believe the net result on the whole election hitherto is five gains or ten votes on a division; but all our people are jubilant, and I gather from extracts in *The Times* that the foreign press is much impressed, and that the *Wiener Zeitung* in an article on "Joseph Africanus" goes so far as to say that I am the most successful statesman of the age!

October 12.— . . . To-day's elections are good so far. . . . The Midlands will remain exactly the same numbers as before the dissolution. I believe to-morrow is the last polling day except for Orkney and Shetland.

We are hard at work on the changes in the garden. . . . Austen has been indefatigable, when he has had any time to spare, in pruning trees and there has been a great deal of lopping of the old oaks. There is also a great deal of planting still to be done, and the rhododendron borders, which were left last year, to be remade, and the lower garden to be replanted, so there is plenty of occupation. . . .

October 14.— . . . It is a pleasure to think that you now have good weather and that you have, much against your will no doubt, escaped all the turmoil of the General Election. It has been fought with the greatest malignity by the baser sort on the other side, and their disgraceful proceedings have only been repudiated by one single man, that is Sir Edward Grey. They are a bad lot. . . .

It seems as though we shall come out of the Election exactly as we went into it. That is not bad, as the Radicals hoped to gain 24 seats and reduce our majority to 80—but the Counties have not done as well

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as I expected, and my own hope was that we should gain between five and ten seats on balance. . . .

October 15.—(*Colonial Office.*) . . . I shall leave heaps of unfinished work when I go on my holiday. Alas, why are holidays required? . . .

October 16.—(*Colonial Office.*) . . . I saw Lord Salisbury this morning and he was very well. He told me some interesting things about the Government, but I cannot write about them. . . . I believe the election ended with two places gained to us. It is curious that there is so little change on either side. I understand the Conservative organisation expected that we should lose fifteen seats, or thirty votes and the Radicals put our losses at twenty-four seats. . . .

News of the final contest had still to come from Ultima Thule. Orkney and Shetland gave another unexpected success to the Unionists. Altogether they had gained three seats on balance. Their majority at the dissolution had been 128. It was now 134—larger than Peel, Palmerston, Disraeli or Gladstone had ever commanded. In the House of Commons the Ministerial ranks would be only nine less than in 1895. But somewhat larger than then was the Unionist majority of the nation's total poll. There was some little distinction between town and shire. In the boroughs, never had the Unionists, much less the Conservatives before them, received so large a proportion of the votes. In London, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle and the rest, not to speak of Birmingham, the Opposition suffered a "mighty smash", as Chamberlain put it. In the county divisions, however, the Liberals, making a remarkably tough fight of it as a party despite their variegated dissensions, captured a few more seats than they forfeited; but even the shires showed a slight relative increase in the aggregate vote for the Government. Wales was the only part of the United Kingdom where Liberalism made headway. But Scotland manifested itself more powerfully in the opposite sense and for the first time since 1832 returned a majority against Liberalism.[1]

[1] The Scottish correspondent of the *Annual Register* recorded: "Nowhere probably was the extraordinary exhibition of Liberal disunion afforded by the division (July 25) on the motion for the reduction of Mr. Chamberlain's salary, taken to heart more seriously than in Scotland. More sorrowfully, it may be, but not less surely, than in England did large numbers of electors in Scotland who had never before given anything but a Liberal vote conclude that the party uncertainly led and certainly not con-

Glasgow was as solid as Birmingham. In the Midland territory around him Chamberlain had won again six-sevenths of the seats—an unmatched command of its kind. "Not bad, but I wanted to make a gain." He had hoped for a Unionist majority of 150 in the House of Commons, but 130 or so "will do".

VII

A contradiction unknown before made more extraordinary Chamberlain's triumph in the Khaki Election. It was the strange fact that the Government thus confirmed in office for want of a safe alternative was in itself intensely unpopular. Unpardoned for the humiliations of the war at the outset, accused of trying to tamper with military dispatches and of failure in medical organisation, the Salisbury Cabinet was denounced and derided wherever men met together. The chaotic state of Liberalism, the prevailing belief that its success at the British polls would mean the political defeat, partial or total, of British arms in South Africa—these considerations excluded a Liberal Ministry. A stubborn nation, no whit less convinced in the bulk than the Boers of the justice of its cause, was utterly bent on absolute victory in the field and on a firm peace—a settlement without rancour, looking steadily to reconciliation, but bringing the two Republics under the British flag. For all these reasons large numbers of electors, who voted to renew the tenure of an unpopular government, vowed while they were marking their ballot-papers in its favour never to vote for it again.

Amongst Ministers Chamberlain in the view of the majority of the nation stood as a tower of strength. Never had he less personal pleasure in a public combat—not even in 1886 when his mood in victory was joyless enough. His cup was full of bitterness. He said much less than he felt when he wrote to an old friend that the result of the Khaki Election had been "on the whole most satisfactory", but "I have felt a little sick at times at the abominable flood of slanders that has been poured

trolled by Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman at Westminster, had for the moment shown itself disqualified for the conduct of Imperial affairs" (*Annual Register*, 1900, p. 248).

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. out on my unfortunate head".[1] At the time he believed the Khaki Election an imperative of statesmanship. A few months afterwards he had full reason to think his instinct providential. A postponed election might have spelt Unionist ruin.

The war in any serious sense did indeed seem over in the mid-autumn of 1900. It seemed so to Lord Roberts, the retiring Commander-in-Chief, and so it seemed to the Colonial Secretary and the large majority of his countrymen. A little later many in both parties pretended to a prescience which they had not possessed before the event but attributed to themselves afterwards. Just before the last election return in Great Britain came from Orkney and Shetland, Kruger embarked in the Dutch man-of-war which carried him from Lourenço Marques to Marseilles. We may well return here to a thought touched in the last chapter. Chamberlain in his career had completely overthrown the ideas and plans of three men who belong like him to world history. They were Gladstone, Parnell and Kruger. To each of them he had offered terms.[2] To each of them he seemed less formidable than he was because none of them could realise in time—it was the same with Germany—that what he said he meant. Now, for ever, Kruger was out of the Transvaal and out of South Africa.

At home, for the time, the Colonial Secretary seemed to have put his enemies under his feet. In all likelihood he had won for Unionist Government another parliamentary term making at the end of it ten or eleven continuous years of power. The thing, as we have noted, was not exampled in British political leadership since 1832. As Chamberlain had carried the Government on his back through the debates of the war session, so he carried the Government on his back through the fight at the polls. The one-man election of 1900 as a personal achievement remains single in democratic history.

His speaking and administration were universally acknowledged to show executive efficiency of the highest order. Some said still that he lacked the high touch of inspiration in words.

[1] Chamberlain to Jesse Collings, October 10, 1900.

[2] Parnell, of course, was destroyed in the end by the divorce case. The meaning here is that but for Chamberlain, Gladstone and Parnell in all probability would have carried Home Rule in some shape before the divorce case exploded.

Is inspiration in work of less value? And if we apply the military analogies, what never can be denied to Chamberlain is the genius of combat. This was Lord Morley's opinion. He abhorred the South African War, and his comments on the Khaki Election were not amiable at the time. Looking back in calmer years he records that he found partial comfort in the destruction of Liberal Imperialist hopes by the crushing strategy of his old friend. "In a war no middle section gets a real hold. The neo-Palmerstonians were confronted, and in fact overwhelmed, by the peculiar genius, the fire and the popularity of Chamberlain, now risen to a commanding position."[1]

[1] John, Viscount Morley, *Recollections*, vol. ii. p. 89.

CHAPTER LXXV

MINISTERIAL RECONSTRUCTION—"THE CLIMAX OF CALUMNY"—A CENTURY'S CLOSE AND "THE MAN OF THE FUTURE"

(1900)

A LULL between Storms—"The Dream of Every Patriotic Man"—A Remodelled Administration—"The Hotel Cecil"—Some Ironies of Chamberlain's Position—Treasury *versus* Colonial Office—A Mediterranean Interlude—Meeting of the New Parliament—Birmingham and War Contracts—The Cup of Bitterness—The "Kynoch Debate" and Chamberlain's Vindication—South Africa and the Second War—The Goal of Self-Government and Federation—Parliament Rises—Thoughts at Highbury—The Three Great Tasks—Old Age Pensions: "I am not dead yet"—From Isolation to Security—"Closer Union of the Empire," but How?—Peril and Destiny—From the Old Century to the New.

I

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THIS was indeed a position of personal dominance seldom attained by Prime Ministers and never before equalled in modern British politics by any statesman not the head of a government. The fact was more universally admitted than welcomed in other countries bound to reckon with the Colonial Secretary for more years to come. Anglophobes who had denounced the South African struggle as "Chamberlain's war" now described the Khaki Elections as "Chamberlain's victory". This man's strength was part of Britain's strength. Its people, by extending Unionist administration for a second term, had given a rare example of democratic steadiness.

Before going abroad he received his "box" from the Fishmongers' Company, and spoke with singular eloquence, as his opponents allowed. "In our trial our hands were stayed by

our Colonies, as the hands of Moses were stayed by Aaron and Hur, until victory waited on our arms". Federation of the Empire was "the dream of every patriotic man".[1]

Between the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary some conversation had passed already on the reconstruction of the Cabinet. Chamberlain with his son Austen left for the Mediterranean intending to visit Gibraltar and Malta, then to meet at Naples his wife and her mother Mrs. Endicott. He hoped to return home through Italy at a holiday pace. At the Rock he received a long cipher telegram announcing the principal changes in the Government and mostly confirming what he knew. It gave him pleasure and pride that his son Austen, hitherto Civil Lord of the Admiralty, was now to become Financial Secretary to the Treasury - the mounting-block to Cabinet rank.

The Government was more deeply altered within than external appearances showed. Time had told upon the veterans of Unionism, except, it seemed, the Colonial Secretary. He continued by his own choice in the post he had made world-famous. Goschen, who insisted upon retiring from the Ministry, had well earned both his repose and his peerage. The Duke of Devonshire retained office with indifference and without danger to his repose. Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Chancellor of the Exchequer, had to be entreated to remain in the Government. Lord Salisbury, now over seventy, an aged man in every sense, could not attempt to cope further with his double task as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary two functions which at the best never can be combined without detriment to one or the other. Lord Lansdowne became Foreign Secretary, an appointment more apt than popular, when he was still unfairly vilified for the military failures. In his stead Mr. St. John Brodrick, summoned to grapple with army reform, was soon to find the War Office not a bed of roses but a couch of thorns. Lord Selborne, far more fortunate, rose to the great post of First Lord of the Admiralty, and ceased to be Chamberlain's right hand at the Colonial department.

Two Cabinet changes of another kind touched Chamberlain shrewdly. The former Home Secretary, Sir Matthew White Ridley, had aided staunchly the Workmen's Compensation Bill.

[1] Fishmongers' Hall, October 24, 1900.

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The former President of the Local Government Board, Henry Chaplin, was a warm friend to the Colonial Secretary and benevolent towards Old Age Pensions. On the plea that room must be made for younger men both these Ministers were removed, to the majestic umbrage of "the Squire" and the lasting pain of White Ridley. Neither was amongst the seniors of the Cabinet. One of them was under sixty, the other fifty-eight. To the Home Office in fact went an older man though a robust, Ritchie, translated from the Board of Trade. He was one day to prove an obstinate impediment in Chamberlain's path.

II

The public demand for a stronger administration was by no means satisfied. Under party conditions as then standing nothing available was much better than what was offered. The Duke of Wellington, holding his hand to his ear and ejaculating surprise, gave a name to the "Who? Who? Cabinet". Now, lively critics disputed the adequacy of various Ministers to their offices, and dubbed the new construction the "Why? Why? Cabinet". Derisory humour even on the Unionist side jested that the "Hotel Cecil" of politics, already extensive, had enlarged its accommodation. Lord Salisbury's family was represented by four seats in the Cabinet; and outside it his eldest son, Lord Cranborne, became very naturally Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. George Wyndham was made Irish Chief Secretary without a seat in the Cabinet.

The Carlton Club was rife with bitter mutterings that the Liberal-Unionists had again obtained more than their share of good things. It was a foolish complaint covering personal griefs. Chamberlain thought his recognised following slightly under-represented in the minor offices, but Lord Salisbury maintained the contrary with almost acid arithmetic.

In effect, however, Conservative predominance in the Government as reconstituted was enhanced; and so skilfully as to colour the belief that the real initiator of many of these arrangements was not Lord Salisbury but Arthur Balfour.[1] That

[1] Through him for instance passed the suggestion that the Chancellor of the Duchy, Lord James, who was seventy-two, should resign, but that Minister would not hear of it. Balfour, then fifty-two and not foreseeing the

statesman, as leader of the House of Commons, looked to invigorate debating power on the Treasury Bench; most of the new and promoted Ministers were his special adherents. His position in the Cabinet was markedly reinforced and it was evident that in a year or two he would become Prime Minister in succession to his uncle. With the Colonial Minister he maintained relations of unclouded cordiality.

The Cabinet sequel to the Khaki Election was ironical none the less. Chamberlain's exertions had conquered this unprecedented renewal of tenure. His power in the country, especially over the urban masses of the Unionist democracy, surpassed that of all his colleagues put together. In foreign eyes he stood for Britain as typically as William the Second stood for Germany, or as Theodore Roosevelt was very soon to stand for the United States. Yet his position in the Government itself though fortified for some purposes was impaired for others. Some Ministers who were old friends had been replaced by others less sympathetic or neutral.

But the principal change to his disadvantage was of another kind. Antagonism hardened between the Colonial Office and the Treasury. As we saw, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had desired to resign but was persuaded to stay. Sir Michael Hicks Beach was a determined character wielding increased advantages. A financial guardian stern as any Gladstonian could desire, he was no less an orthodox "free trader" opposed to an Imperial Zollverein and alternative heresies.

Behind this negative was the serried phalanx of the Treasury experts under their redoubtable permanent chief, Sir Francis Mowatt. The same convictions and influences would be asserted presently under another Unionist Chancellor of the Exchequer, with historic and disruptive consequences not then foreseen.

III

Early in December 1900 the new Parliament was to assemble. In the weeks beforehand Chamberlain's visions of a real holiday

length of his own political career, was pained by this venerable tenacity. Askwith's *Lord James of Hereford*, p. 259; Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 278.

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in Italy, however short, were overcast. The first part of his Mediterranean tour was enjoyable enough, though partly official. It was not his first visit to Gibraltar, and he stayed but a couple of days. To illustrate the defence of the Rock a mimic fight was held, when the guns of the fortress making excellent shell-practice at a towed target were supposed to vanquish torpedo-boats. Then, with Austen, he left on the battleship *Caesar* for Malta. His four days on that island were filled with functions in his honour. There were official dinners and interviews; there was a gala night at the opera. The Warwickshire Regiment claiming him as their shireman organised in the Palace Square a torchlight tattoo with massed bands. Majestic was the sight of the fleet steaming slowly into the grand harbour.

The dispute about the languages—Italian, Maltese and English—was still a burning quarrel in the island-fortress and not to be quenched. The Colonial Secretary was unable to hold out any hope that recent measures for the extended use of English alternatively with Italian would be rescinded. Journalism in Italy seethed with personal denunciations of Chamberlain. This was not promising for the expected journey homeward through the peninsula, nor were other circumstances propitious. The *Caesar* carried him indeed from Malta to Naples, where, after a separation of nearly two months, and it seemed to him long, he found his wife. He had meant to circumvent Rome and diplomatic dilemmas by sailing from Castellammare to Genoa on H.M. dispatch-boat *Surprise*. Foul weather blew away this plan, and compelled return overland from Naples. At Rome he was delayed for a couple of days against his will, and his visit was strictly informal. He gave a morning to the Forum. At the British Embassy he met at luncheon the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marquis Visconti-Venosta, but it had no political bearing. Then he and his party came straight back to England.

There had been no such refreshing rest as should have enabled him to recuperate after those prodigies of energy he had spent in the elections. Instead the immediate sequel of that triumph spared him nothing. He had to gird up his loins for the most repugnant of all his encounters at Westminster. In the new House of Commons an attempt would be made to blast his private

honour as touching war contracts and the industrial connections of his family and clan.

It had been his first desire to take legal proceedings. Several eminent counsel advised against it. Their searching scrutiny failed to discover in the worst comments of some Radical journals a single passage whereon action could be founded.

The most noxious of the innuendos were accompanied by disavowals of any intention to breathe upon his integrity. The adroit scribes disclaimed, no less, party zeal and personal vindictiveness. They were actuated solely by zeal for the purity of our tradition. Inordinate black type exhibited the family relationships of the whole Chamberlain-Kenrick clan; and displayed their investments in Birmingham industries doing any part of their business with the War Office or the Admiralty. These investments had been made long since, without the faintest thought of possible trouble with the Boers. And we have seen that until war became unavoidable what the Colonial Secretary worked for was peace. But *Punch* remarked: "The more the Empire expands the more the Chamberlains contract". This was hard to bear, but it did not come within the law. It showed how much mischief had been done for the moment by the subtlety of defamation, wherein eminent counsel could not put a finger on any tangible charge of "an improper use of official position and influence".

Parliament met on the third of December. The Opposition, otherwise more lacerated than before by discords fated to become still worse, were unanimous in their very human desire to inflict some kind of retribution upon the author of their common overthrow. They could fight on two lines. They could protest that the war was anything but over; that the General Election had been intentionally held on false pretences. And they could seek to discredit Chamberlain on the charges not of malpractice—by no means—but of financial indelicacy. From allusions in both Houses it was evident at the opening that the feud against the Colonial Secretary would be renewed with blood-lust.

In the Commons the politician who proposed to bait the lion was Mr. Lloyd George. The member for Carnarvon, coming to the front, was regarded by his seniors on both sides as extraordinarily clever, but was not yet credited with the force of

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genius revealed years later. Strange to say just before the war he and the Colonial Secretary had nearly come to friendship on the subject of Old Age Pensions. He admired Chamberlain, lamented his severance from Liberalism as an almost irreparable loss, and recognised his continued sincerity on social reform.

Just at present these considerate sentiments were in abeyance. Mr. Lloyd George felt himself compelled to bury the calumet instead of the hatchet. The young Welshman, as a champion of small peoples, was an impassioned advocate of the Boers, a total opponent of the war; and not Labouchere himself would have more exulted at that time in the Colonial Secretary's political destruction, were it compassable. We must recall these realities of a fierce hour.

IV

On December the tenth a prelude to the chief encounter kept the House in a bubbling humour. Two chagrined Tories —Bartley who had some abilities and Gibson Bowles who had wit—inveighed against the preponderance of one family in the remodelled Ministry. "In our Conservative clubs and elsewhere the Government is called 'The Hotel Cecil Unlimited'." [1]

The House passed from comedy to suppressed drama of a more painful kind when Mr. Lloyd George stood up to move as an amendment to the Address that:

> Ministers of the Crown and members of either House of Parliament holding subordinate office in any public department ought to have no interest direct or indirect in any firm or company competing for contracts with the Crown unless the nature and extent of such influence being first declared Your Majesty shall have sanctioned the continuance thereof and when necessary shall have directed such precautions to be taken as may effectually prevent any suspicion of influence or favouritism in the allocation of such contracts.

The Colonial Secretary and his elder son were struck at as all members knew. No art could make this a delectable theme, nor does retrospect at the present day improve it. In manner the member for Carnarvon made no slip; he was expert in cool delivery, verbal restraint, and projected inference.

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxviii. col. 375.

Chamberlain listened with a stoic mask. He had to endure the delay caused by other speeches. When he rose his emotion vibrated as never yet in the House of Commons. But he never lost self-command; and he had not been many minutes on his feet before the whole House knew that once more he would carry the debate. Tearing away the veils, he attacked the personal animus behind the formulas of public zeal; stigmatised the indictment as a "dreary flow of petty malignity"; denounced the malevolent prying at Somerset House. He showed that he had no responsibility for his relations. But vindicating their integrity, he reminded the House that his family represented two centuries of unblemished tradition in business; and he entrusted his own character to the judgment of the Commons.

I believe I am ready to take blows in a fair contest with a smiling face. . . . I have never complained of any attack made upon me in a fair field and in regard to my public action; but this is not fair fighting. . . . It is true that nobody has made an accusation. It has been a conspiracy of insinuation—which is infinitely worse. . . .

When I went into public life I gave up business altogether. I withdrew my capital such as it was. I had to invest it somehow, but I have endeavoured in the whole course of my public life to be in the position in which Caesar's wife should have been—to give no cause even of suspicion to the most malicious of my opponents. . . . I will take one case. I was a considerable shareholder in the Small Arms Company and in another company, Kynochs. Now, what did I do? I sold out of both companies and I sold out of them at a loss. . . .

If the object of those who entered in this conspiracy was to give pain I must admit that they have succeeded. . . . They have not injured me. They have not injured my cause. I have never received so many kindly letters and assurances of support and sympathy as I have done during the last few weeks. But they have introduced into our public life methods of controversy which are unworthy, and have made it more difficult for honourable, sensitive men to serve the State.[1]

No one believed in the least that there was a fleck upon his honour. Nor upon that of "Mr. Austen Chamberlain", as then he was, whose short statement followed his father's. A grudging

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxviii. cols. 432-447 (December 10, 1900).

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homily by Campbell-Bannerman was answered by Arthur Balfour with scathing banter of the Opposition and fine tribute to his colleague. "Wanted, a man to serve Her Majesty, with no money, no relations." The Colonial Secretary had "never stood higher in the general opinion of his countrymen than he does at this moment". The Amendment was rejected by a majority of 142.

Chamberlain never had received in his life so many messages of sympathy and confidence as were showered from all parts of the country after this moved and moving reply. Nothing touched him so much as the letter from his friend the former Home Secretary, squeezed out of the Government when reconstructed:

SIR M. WHITE RIDLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 9.— . . . You will allow me, I am sure, to say how indignant I am at the charges which . . . are brought against you. From "Labby" one would expect such things—but from more responsible persons it is atrocious. I was delighted to see your triumph on Friday night—and only sorry not to hear it at first hand.

I had hoped to take a part in amending and extending the Compensation Act, but it was not to be, and I must accept the position of a fossil which is forced on me. "*Wenn man nicht haben kann, was man liebt, so muss man lieben, was man hat,*" as the Duchess of Gerolstein I believe said.[1] Good luck to you in every way—and thanks for all your kindness as a colleague, a fact of which I shall always be proud.

The "conspiracy of insinuation" was frustrated as a political engine, but its authors in another way had more success than they knew. Chamberlain was cut to the quick as never before, and it was some time before he could look back on this affair with his usual buoyancy of scorn. No good came of it to the Opposition.

Mr. Lloyd George visiting Birmingham a year later met with a rough and even dangerous reception. This not, as the usual legend runs, because he was a fervent and fearless "pro-Boer", but because Birmingham neither forgot nor forgave so soon the

[1] Sancho Panza put it another way: "When you can't get what you like you must like what you can get".

"conspiracy of insinuation" against the private honour of Chamberlain and his clan. The city was unshakeably identified with the statesman whose local work since his great Mayoralty long ago had been crowned at that very time by his work for the creation and endowment of Birmingham University.

V

Assailed meanwhile on other issues, small and great, Chamberlain more than held his ground. The Opposition were entitled to harry him upon the contrast between his electoral declarations and the dismal sequel in South Africa. He had tried, they said, to mislead the constituencies by an optimistic prospectus which he knew to be fraudulent.

That version could only be believed by partisans whose demoniac view of his character was incurable. Lord Roberts himself had announced early in October that the war was over. For weeks afterwards his estimate was shared by most competent authorities. President Kruger was a fugitive; the Republics were officially annexed; in the Transvaal the British had reached the Portuguese frontier, and commanded at Komati Poort, the Delagoa Bay railway. There was no hope of foreign intervention. The Boers could not keep large organised forces in the field nor make a battle-stand anywhere. It seemed that indeed the war was over in the ordinary military sense. And it would have been over had the Boer leaders in the field been ordinary men.

Instead, they were men of heroic heart and consummate resource—Botha, Delarey and De Wet; Smuts and Hertzog, Viljoen and Beyers, Olivier and Kemp. They determined to devote themselves and their people to a second war of another kind and to fight to the last. For guerilla South Africa provided matchless advantages. The distance from Cape Town to Pretoria was near a thousand miles. The British communications stretching through solitary lands were the longest, loneliest, most exposed lines ever offered to attack. And the guerilleros in this case were horsemen and marksmen appearing and disappearing with Parthian rapidity and skill. They were ubiquitous and elusive. They could assemble unexpectedly at any one of a hundred

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points and vanish again into space. British pursuit rarely could be immediate, much less sure of its direction.

For the new struggle, Botha and his lieutenants broke up their forces into small commandos whose mobility sometimes made them seem countless. Invisible themselves before an enterprise, they eyed the British. They knew every inch of the country; all its folk formed a patriotic intelligence service. The same man in the same clothes who seemed a submitted farmer one day might be a fighter in the saddle next day or next hour. Nothing could have suited better the spirit of the burghers and their lifelong aptitudes.

When Kitchener succeeded Roberts at the end of November, the second and more dreary war was in full swing. British communications were cut, posts rushed, convoys captured, isolated columns dogged and overpowered. Backwards and forwards the guerilla bands rode through our cordons. Unless the British were to accept defeat harder measures had to be taken. War in its nature never can be waged on terms of limited liability for one side. Because the farms were hostile bases their destruction began—to Chamberlain's and Milner's disquiet—and this meant removing the civil population.

Though the stubbornness and repulsiveness of the coming ordeal could not yet be fully realised at Westminster, the Opposition sighted all its batteries against the Colonial Secretary.

Campbell-Bannerman might well express his uneasiness about farm-burning and the deportation of women and children. He mixed up these matters with electioneering complaints, and especially scolded Chamberlain, as if he alone were responsible, for the publication of the correspondence found at Bloemfontein. As though Club etiquette were a punctilious part of the conduct of war, the Liberal leader declaimed: "What is said of a man in private life who publishes a private letter for his own advantage that has somehow come into his hands? Why, he is visited with the extremest penalty that a society unorganised by law can inflict. Am I to be told that an act of this kind which would exclude a man from honourable society is an honourable act on the part of a Minister of the Crown?" [1]

This moral rebuke from a party-leader, who did not look like

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxviii. cols. 113-114 (December 6, 1900).

Athanasius, led to a hot incident. The Colonial Secretary under extreme provocation lost his control for an instant.

MR. J. CHAMBERLAIN: ". . . Well, you shall have the truth."

AN HON. MEMBER: "It is the first time you have told it."

MR. J. CHAMBERLAIN was understood to say that was the language of a cad. [Cries of "Order, order!" and "Withdraw".]

He withdrew at once, though the primary offender remained anonymous. Then he recovered his composure. Instead of flinching about the Khaki Election he gloried in it, and again carried the war right and left into the enemy's ranks. He jested in effect that the Opposition leader was not the arbiter of etiquette nor the First Gentleman in Europe.

I deeply regret that I am to be cut off from the society of the right hon. gentleman, which I never enjoyed. . . . This act, he says [the publication of the Bloemfontein letters], is an act which renders the person who committed it unworthy of his society. Very well; it was the act of the Government . . . the right hon. gentleman cuts himself off from every member of the Government. . . . His accusation, so far as it is a just one, applies not only to me, but to the Prime Minister, to the Duke of Devonshire, to my right hon. friend the First Lord of the Treasury [Arthur Balfour] and to all my colleagues.[1]

At the end of his counter-attack he quoted with his old art the most scurrilous language used on the other side during the elections, and it made his own seem mild. "The real fact is that they have been beaten and they take their beating badly."

VI

Next day Chamberlain on a far broader issue won praise from his foes. An amendment moved in a Liberal Imperialist spirit gave him the opportunity to explain his ideas upon the future of South Africa.

With his conciliatory mind towards the Boers we here are well acquainted, but at that time his speech was an astonishment to many who had imagined him a jingo Ahab coveting goldfields

[1] *Ibid.* cols. 183-184.

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instead of vineyards. He dwelt first on the new military conditions created by the guerilla in South Africa and then upon his plan of settlement. On farm-burning he stated the military case. "But the House may rest assured that both the Government and all the Generals in the field, including Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief, are of opinion that this particular punishment should be used as sparingly as possible." Not yet was the rigour of the next phase foreseen.

Then he came to his own thoughts on the future. In the late Republics after the war an interval of Crown Colony government would be an unavoidable transition from military rule to civil freedom:

> I believe we can promise that there shall be throughout South Africa equal laws, equal liberty—not indeed political independence. In the first instance, that must be more restricted in these two colonies than it is in the colonies of the Cape and Natal, but a liberty and constitution leading ultimately to self-government which we all desire to see established as soon as possible.... We entertain absolutely no vindicitive feelings whatever towards the men who have been in arms against us.... They are brave foes and they should be treated as brave foes; and it is in that spirit that we shall approach them.[1]

Asquith for the Liberal Imperialists recognised the lucidity and reason of the Colonial Minister's plan of progress towards Boer self-government in the annexed territories. "The House when it rose last night was in a state of absolute darkness as to the intentions of the Government regarding the future of South Africa." Campbell-Bannerman found as little cause to cavil at "a speech which I at once frankly say is very much more favourable to our object than we anticipated".

Deeper than he could say in debate, Chamberlain's desire for a healing settlement appears fully in his correspondence with the High Commissioner towards the close of the year. Milner and his Chief were of one mind and heart in the premature hope of beginning economic reconstruction in South Africa by restarting the Rand mines before the complete cessation of hostilities.

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxxxviii. cols. 261-263 (December 7, 1900).

VII

On another matter, they were in severe disagreement. The atmosphere of the predominantly Dutch districts in Cape Colony was electric with sedition. A second and more dangerous rising might come at any moment, as it did before long. In press and pulpit the Afrikander agitation with rising heat demanded peace by the restoration of the independence of the Republics, that is, by British surrender.[1] The Sprigg Ministry by comparison with Afrikander vehemence was a reed in the wind. The situation might have distracted a stolid man and harrowed Milner's intense nature. More than ever he longs to be freed from the fetters of the Cape Constitution and to rule direct; and the feeling of all the British about him ran violently in his favour.

MILNER TO CHAMBERLAIN

October 28, 1900.—You will be tired of congratulations about the General Election. . . . The Election, however, has only come in the nick of time. If the present discouraging phase of the war had been realised at home, as it probably will be in another six weeks—for true impressions travel slowly—I cannot but feel it would have had a mischievous effect on public opinion. . . . I am fairly taken aback by the vitality and ubiquity of the enemy. . . .

November 14.— . . . But what I chiefly wish to refer to to-day is the state of the Colony. This is "King Charles's head" indeed. I know you have thought me a pessimist. But I am sorry to say that every week that passes convinces me more and more that *the system is an impossible one*. . . . In every district firebrands are roaming about and I have no doubt that, if any small commando were to slip through, it would find adherents in almost any part of the Colony. . . . Yet one is sometimes tempted to wonder whether another rising would not really be the best thing in the long run. I believe it would if it finally disabused the public mind at home of what I can only call the superstition that you can govern a country in which the majority of citizens are your enemies, by a system of autonomy more complete than any Separatist ever pro-

[1] The People's Congress at Worcester, December 6, 1900. Basil Worsfold, *Lord Milner's Work in South Africa*, pp. 400-410; and *Milner Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 174-178.

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posed even for Ireland. I quite understand the difficulty at home though I perhaps hardly share your anxiety as to what would be said in other self-governing colonies. . . .

December 5.— . . . Personally, I consider it is just the toss of a coin whether we have a conflagration or not. . . . Of course it is *criminal* to run these frightful risks. But that is the inevitable result of the system. "Responsible government" in war-time, in a country where the majority is hostile to you, cannot work. . . .

This last letter reached Chamberlain when enjoying again some rest at Highbury. Not for more than three months since the electoral campaign began had he been able to write at length to Milner. He now replies at once and in full. One thing at least he understands much better than Milner, and that is the management of public opinion and parliamentary institutions. Gently he avoids reminding the High Commissioner of this, but he wields his proper authority:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MILNER

Colonial Office, December 22, 1900.— . . . I hope and still believe that nothing in the nature of a serious rising will take place, but of course you have to face the possibility of all eventualities, and I appreciate the difficult position in which you are thus placed. Here I meet all doubts by reminding people of the old Yorkshire motto "It's dogged as does it." . . .

I appreciate as fully as you can wish the additional difficulties in your path caused by the existence of responsible Government under the circumstances of the Colony, but I cannot too seriously impress upon you the importance of working even with the imperfect instruments in our hands rather than by revolutionary methods. Hitherto we have kept this country wholly with us. A false step might endanger our position, and although I am prepared to make every use of all the weapons in my hands, I am not yet inclined to throw up the game and go to Parliament for extraordinary and absolutely unprecedented powers. Meanwhile we are sending out more mounted men and neither money nor effort will be spared on this side. . . .

I am dying to hear that you have commenced some sort of civil administration anywhere in the two Colonies. I utterly distrust military administration, and I believe that it is calculated to increase the number

of our enemies, and to exacerbate their hostile feelings. Even the most skeleton form of civil government would be better than none and would be an earnest to the world of our intention to carry out our ideas as they have been publicly declared. . . .

That Chamberlain never could be brought to think of asking the Imperial Parliament to suspend the Constitution of a self-governing Colony, the High Commissioner realised at this refusal; but it did not alter a whit his own opinion. His ideas were wont to deepen their channels by the scour of their flow.

In mid-December Hertzog and Kritzinger crossed the Orange River. Penetrating deep into the Colony, they prepared the way for De Wet's following incursion. The second menace to the Cape would be thwarted within a couple of months but as yet there was no certainty that it might not become more menacing than the first rebellion. In the week before Christmas martial law was proclaimed in many districts. Despite disagreement upon one issue the Colonial Secretary gave the High Commissioner the warmest support. Lately Milner had been unusually abused at home by anti-war newspapers and speakers. Now at Chamberlain's instance and as a conspicuous mark of the Government's confidence, it was resolved to bestow on him the Grand Cross of the Bath.[1]

Yet some of the Cabinet thought Milner "hysterical" and the rest thought him overstrained.

CHAMBERLAIN TO BRODRICK AND SALISBURY

December 21, 1900.—*To Brodrick, Secretary for War.*—The news from South Africa is bad. It is probable that Milner is overstrained and too pessimistic, but the invasion of the Colony is serious. It is evident that what is wanted is mounted infantry and more mounted infantry and always mounted infantry. . . . It seems to me that it would be much better to take *all* the horses in the country where any Boers are operating than to burn farms. They can be paid for, if thought necessary, and without them neither De Wet nor anyone else can go on for long. To shoot a horse is better in the present stage than to shoot a man. . . .

December 27.—*To Salisbury.*— . . . I am still persistently optimist

[1] *Milner Papers*, vol. ii. p. 185 (Chamberlain to Milner, December 27, 1900).

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and believe that all will come out well in the long run, including our indemnity for 50 millions! . . .

This indomitable mood would never fail for a moment, whatever might betide, and by that spirit he would maintain his leadership of the nation and the Empire with undiminished command to the close of the struggle. It was to be longer than he or any of his colleagues yet began to suspect, and more testing in every way, military and political.

VIII

To his relief the new Parliament rose in mid-December not to reassemble until mid-February. The short session of twelve days had been his most repulsive experience in the House of Commons since he entered it nearly twenty-five years ago. As always, the victor paid his price and felt it, as we saw. But after he got over the nausea of the Kynoch debate he recked little of the cost compared with the prize. So far from repenting the Khaki Election, he believed that he had been guided by an almost inspired instinct in appealing to the nation before the South African guerilla spread.

His victory remained. What would he do with it? When the House dispersed he was free as he had not been for a long while to think and plan, to revolve probabilities in politics and to conjecture beyond them. The new Parliament after a brief inauguration had yet to begin its real life. During the last five years he had done most, as he hoped at the outset, to make the Unionist Government memorable. He looked to make the next five years more memorable. It was not his way, as life went on, to abate his aims.

More than ever Highbury was his delight and solace; there alone he had days, and sometimes as now weeks, of peace; and often he seized upon the chance of returning to it even for a few hours. Within its bounds he found infinite refreshment when the weather was tolerable, and every glance of pleasure suggested an idea of improvement. He was like most true gardeners in this, that the happiness he took in present things was mingled with the imagination of flowers and leaves to come—shapes and colours of the future. Especially the orchid-lover would seem to

be one, as Keats says, who "breeding flowers will never breed the same". So in politics—meditating, as it were, what to plant and create in the next season.

What was his general outlook in these closing days of the nineteenth century? He had in his mind together three great issues, social, foreign and Imperial.

IX

Was the social reformer in him extinct as all the Opposition said? During the elections Harcourt caricatured him in effect as an ex-democrat who had become the Bombastes of Imperialism and deserted the people. Chamberlain flung back, "I am not dead yet". Unceasing were Liberal jeers on one subject and it must be admitted that they were as telling as undeserved. Foiled so far by circumstance—like every constructive statesman in some great designs—he had never abandoned the hope of establishing Old Age Pensions before he went out of office. The Unionist Government kept its promise of enquiry; but in July 1898 the Rothschild Committee's report was an exhaustive negation, to the Colonial Secretary's wrath. The majority of the Cabinet, like the Chancellor of the Exchequer, thought the financial difficulties hopeless. Chamberlain publicly declared that he would not desist from his efforts "to secure the veterans of industry, the men who have fought a good fight, from the worst consequences of failing powers and of undeserved misfortune".[1] Though the venerable Lord Wemyss of that day, in the name of the Liberty and Property Defence League, excommunicated him for rank socialism, he gathered about him a band of young Unionists who shared his practical idealism and regarded him with unbounded devotion. "There never was in politics", said one of them, Lionel Holland, "a better host for young men than Mr. Chamberlain. His frankness, his zest and keeness in discussion, were exhilarating."

The last good debates on social reform in that Parliament were heard in the spring before the Boer War. The Opposition had a joyous case on Old Age Pensions, and were out to make the most of it. Asquith excelled himself in one stroke of parody.

[1] Speech at Manchester, November 15, 1898.

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CHAMBERLAIN: "It was a proposal, not a promise."

ASQUITH: "I think it will be sufficient to maintain an action for breach of promise."[1]

The Colonial Secretary suggested that public life would become arid if a statesman never might urge a new ideal without being accused of having bound himself to realise it. But he hoisted his own colours and committed the Government despite most of it:

> We do hope and intend to deal with this matter before we leave office.... I express again my confident hope that before the Government goes out of office, we shall have done something which, if not adequate in the opinion of the right hon. Gentleman, will at all events furnish a practical scheme the experience of which will be extremely useful in the future and will lead to the ultimate solution of the question.[2]

Arthur Balfour winding up the debate as leader of the Commons confirmed this declaration. If, before, there had been no pledge binding the whole Unionist party, there was one now. Next, Chamberlain secured a Select Committee of the House to reopen enquiry. Appointed on May-day 1899, the Committee was composed of seventeen persons. The Chairman was his friend Harry Chaplin. "The Squire" was still President of the Local Government Board, little thinking that his monumental form and kind heart would be so soon removed from that department and from the Treasury Bench.

One member was the historian Lecky, who held, alas! that the idea of Old Age Pensions was one of the most dangerous ever raised in democratic politics; its cost might cripple our competitive power and lead to "the most terrible social catastrophe". Another member, however, was Mr. Lloyd George. His zeal and ability were after Chamberlain's own heart, who thought him the best of the lot, and soon invited him to his private room, where their talk was long and cordial.[3] The discussions in the Committee rose above party lines; Mr. Lloyd George carried with him the progressive Conservatives and con-

[1] Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. lxx. col. 413 (House of Commons, April 24, 1899).

[2] *Ibid*, col. 421 (House of Commons, April 24, 1899).

[3] J. Hugh Edwards, *Life of Lloyd George*, vol. iii. pp. 183-184; H. Du Parcq, *Life of Lloyd George*, vol. ii. pp. 214-215).

verted "The Squire" in the chair. The Report issued in July 1899 recommended pensions to the amount of not less than five shillings a week for all necessitous and deserving persons over sixty-five.[1] With this result as a beginning and with the non-party vote which obtained it the Colonial Secretary was delighted. "Will you stand by it?" said Mr. Lloyd George, when next they had some private words together in the House. "Yes", said Chamberlain outright. With him that one word was as good as many. Had the South African sequel allowed, he would have staked himself on the word, with Mr. Lloyd George as his friend and lieutenant in that cause of social reform, though not otherwise his supporter.

But this was at the very moment when his anticipations of peace were most sanguine and horrified Milner. Not many weeks later came the war. Even then Chamberlain did not let go. In a memorandum for the Cabinet dated November 17 —when Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking were already besieged, but Buller's arrival with the army corps was expected to make short work—he urges a beginning by at least giving pensions to a selected but large class of recipients at a limited charge to the Exchequer. But after that came the Black Week; war-costs multiplied; and the resistance of the Treasury became impregnable for the time. Yet in the Khaki Election he spoke out again:

> We have not done with old-age pensions. I am not dead yet. (Loud and repeated cheers followed by the exclamation "Don't they wish you were dead!" Laughter) . . . I don't wish to live a minute longer than I can have the opportunity, the power, to serve my country. . . . The tale is not told yet . . . perhaps if he [the Labour candidate for East Birmingham] will give me time I shall be more fortunate than I have been in the past.[2]

When he meditated the future at Highbury in these last weeks of 1900 what did he mean or dream concerning his future as a social reformer? The war would not last for ever; and the Treasury as he supposed would not always be in negative hands.

[1] The Select Committee advised that the finance of the scheme should be investigated by experts. The Treasury verdict declared the expense prohibitive.

[2] East Birmingham, September 29, 1900.

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And something unspoken recurred to him when he turned over possibilities in his mind. He had long conjectured as one possibility that a revolution in the commercial policy of the country —providing new financial resources by the revenue derived from some kind of tariff-system—might advance together both the social and Imperial questions. "Free imports without free trade", introduced over half a century before, was regarded by most Unionist statesmen no less than by all Liberal statesmen as eternal law. Should a great challenge become practicable and successful after the war the same policy that knitted the Empire might provide means for Old Age Pensions.

X

Nearer issues were the other two—the future of foreign policy and the future of the Empire. More emphatic than ever was his judgment that Britain must escape some way from isolation. Recently William II. had declined to receive President Kruger, who had been elaborately honoured by President Loubet at the Elysée. This difference emphasised the contrast between German neutrality and Franco-Russian antagonism. On the other hand one ambiguity was disquieting. The so-called Yang-tse agreement lately concluded between London and Berlin became a dead-letter within a few weeks after signature (October 16, 1900). British statesmanship desired effective support against Russia—especially with regard to our interests in northern China and Manchuria—but that support was just what the cardinal principle of German policy prevented. Chamberlain meant to seek security at a near date by what he held to be the best combination not only for Britain and the Empire but for the world's peace and welfare. He would make yet another effort for alliance or solid understanding with Germany. Should that endeavour fail, the alternative of *rapprochement* with France and Russia might have to be looked in the eyes. In foreign policy, after the Boer War, it would have to be one thing or the other. We could not go on as we were.

The third of the main tasks ahead predominated in his thoughts. It could not be approached in earnest until the

restoration of peace in South Africa; but he was destined to stake his all for it well within the term of this second Unionist Parliament created by his victory in the Khaki Election. When he became Colonial Secretary over half a decade before, the first purpose he expressed was to work for "the closer unity of the Empire". How much more than he could guess then was it his purpose now. The theme is the red thread running through the entire texture of this volume. The rally of the self-governing colonies to the mother country moved him like "the trumpet of a prophecy". It proved to be so in a day beyond his days. As it was already, the world had not known the like of this gathering of the sea-wide clans from the utmost shores; and in the flush of his feeling it seemed to Chamberlain—as to many—almost unthinkable that the comradeship in arms should pass away without leaving behind it some form of permanent association for counsel and defence. When Lord Roberts turned the fortunes of war, Chamberlain thought for a time that the commercial crux might be left aside—that federation for defence might be created in the first place; that the *Kriegsverein* might be formed before the *Zollverein*. Taking his courage in both hands—it was his way and never troubled him—he definitely proposed to the self-governing states the establishment of a permanent Imperial Council in London. To the Governor-General of Canada[1] and the Governors of the Australasian colonies he dispatched confidential letters in slightly varying terms but of identical purport. His project and his ardour are breathed in his letter to New South Wales:

CHAMBERLAIN TO LORD BEAUCHAMP

Colonial Office, March 5, 1900.—Secret.— . . . Whatever may have to be recorded in this war there is one great and inestimable gain; the bloodshed has cemented the British Empire, and the sense of unity is stronger than it has ever been before. . . .

Knowing as I do the strong feeling of independence which exists in all the self-governing Colonies, I am almost afraid to make suggestions lest I should appear to presume, and I would greatly prefer that the initiative in any further movement towards closer union should be taken by the Colonies. . . . I desire that, while regarding this letter as

[1] Chamberlain to Minto, March 2, 1900.

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entirely confidential, you should take an early opportunity of sounding your Ministers, and any other persons whom you consider as thoroughly representative, as to the future. . . .

It seems to me that the time has come when the defence of the Empire, and its military and naval resources, have become the common concern of the whole Empire and not of the Mother Country alone, and that joint action, or at least joint consideration, with regard to this subject should be organised on a permanent footing. . . .

I incline to think, therefore, that in the first instance we might rest satisfied with something in the nature of an Imperial Council, acting as an advisory board to enquire into and report to the various Governments on the subject of Imperial Defence. They might, for instance, consider what would be the number and character of the forces which would be permanently maintained by the Mother Country and the several Colonies, and suggest the best organisation of these forces for war. Each part of the Empire would retain absolute control of its own forces and could not be called upon to use it outside its own territory without its own consent.

The members of such a Council might be appointed either for life or for a term of years. They should have a sufficient salary, which might be provided by the Empire in proportion to population, and they might be made Privy Councillors or Life Peers.

If the Council succeeded, further and more extensive powers might well be given to it. . . .

If, after receiving this information, it appears that there is a general desire for some such organisation of the Empire, we can proceed to formulate proposals in greater detail, or it may be to call another conference of Premiers or Representatives to settle details and arrange a practicable scheme. . . .

The replies to this warm enquiry showed that the suggestion of an Imperial Council, though advisory only, would not open a line of advance. Sir Wilfred Laurier, for instance, considered "the arrangement of tariff questions far more likely to bring about Imperial unity than any joint system of Imperial defence".[1]

This was still the position at the end of 1900. But there was a momentous change in Chamberlain's own mind or rather in

[1] John Buchan, *Lord Minto*, pp. 159-160 (Minto to Chamberlain, April 1900).

his heart. Someone in politics would have to risk something, and more than he supposed formerly any British statesman could dare. The emergency might not arise for another year or more. He must hold his hand pending the assembly of an Imperial Conference after the war. Then? He would invite the two Dominions—for the Australian Commonwealth was about to be inaugurated on New Year's day—and the other self-governing States to make their own propositions. He was still in principle for free trade under the flag. But an Imperial Zollverein in that form was a vanished policy. A permanent Imperial Council for defence might well be as unattainable in the first instance though later it might follow almost of itself from another kind of initiative. If preferential trade—a system of reciprocal tariffs—proved indeed to be the only way of approach to the goal which must be aimed at, then a man who set before himself the closer unity of the Empire as the cause above every other cause might have to take his political life in his hands. If the insular system of "free imports without free trade" had to be impugned after more than half a century it would be a mighty battle. This was as yet a recurrent vision of possibility. It was nothing like a set purpose. Nor would he even contemplate it closely unless and until he found himself forced to a choice between impotence and immeasurable courage.

XI

On another account at Highbury as elsewhere the days from Christmas to New Year were no season of ordinary thoughts. The nineteenth century itself passed away. Its claims to pre-eminence amongst all the centuries were exuberant but with all its faults it had prodigious vitality. Apart from chronological convenience these secular divisions of the calendar are of little meaning. New epochs begin before or after the opening of new centuries. But the formal transition compels intelligence to look back over a long range of history and forward to the unknown. General instinct is moved more vaguely in the same way. Everywhere the world's impulses and forces were visibly changing. The Empire was at war, but the nature of the conflict was so exceptional that opposite morals might be drawn. Many

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optimists predicted that despite some recent aberrations the coming age would be glorious beyond example for peace and humane civilisation. That it would be a more perilous age was the conjecture of others.

Chamberlain was both serious and sanguine. In his lifelong way he was stimulated, not daunted, by the difficulties of great attempts. Even these crowded pages have not displayed all the fertility of his initiative and the scope of his work. The full estimate of his Imperial administration belongs to a later survey. Similarly, instead of swerving from the main narrative, it has seemed better to defer themes like the organisation of tropical medicine and the foundation of Birmingham University.

Because of this unmatched capacity for action and leadership some good Liberals as well as nearly all the younger spirits on his own side surmised as the nineteenth century went out—when everyone was talking of the future—that Chamberlain was "the man of the future". The word would have been folly as applied to any other statesman who had already passed the grand climacteric, but in his case it did not seem surprising. In his sixty-fifth year he had not a grey hair and his figure was still taut and elastic; he looked young, felt young, and was still audacious and incalculable. Whatever he had achieved in the five years before he hoped to surpass in the five years coming. Security in foreign affairs and defence instead of harried isolation; provision for the aged poor; a good settlement in South Africa; some crowning endeavour for closer Imperial union—these ideas together were as much, we may say, as any British statesman has ever had upon his mind at one time. To this career at the turn from the nineteenth century to the twentieth there could be no tame sequel. Neither friend nor foe supposed an anti-climax. In democratic politics under a party system the phrase that "fate is temperament" expresses but half the truth. The rest depends on other temperaments and on forces seldom to be surely reckoned in advance. We shall see whither Chamberlain was to be led by vision, character and circumstance.

END OF VOL. III

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